Dharmakīrti's account of yogic intuition as a source of knowledge

Raynald Prévèreau
Faculty of Religious Studies
McGill University, Montréal
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Permanent Address of Author:

c.p. 473
Havre-Saint-Pierre, Qc
G0G 1P0

Signature of Author: Raynald Prévèreau

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Abstract

Writing in seventh century India, the Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti developed a system of epistemology in which he recognized yogic intuition as a valid source of knowledge crowning the practice of meditation and capable of causing the psychological transformation necessary for the achievement of *nirvāṇa*. But his account of the epistemological character of yogic intuition was controversial. Indeed, while it consists in a full understanding of a conceptual object (i.e. the four noble truths), Dharmakīrti insisted that, due to its clarity, the yogin's intuition be considered a category of sensation, which by definition is non-conceptual and pertains to particular objects. This thesis is an analysis of Dharmakīrti's account of yogic intuition as a category of cognition allowing the non-conceptual knowledge of conceptual objects.

Écrivain indien du septième siècle, le philosophe bouddhiste Dharmakīrti élabora un système d'épistémologie selon lequel l'intuition yogique est une source de connaissance couronnant la pratique de la méditation et capable de provoquer la transformation psychologique nécessaire à l'atteinte du *nirvāṇa*. Son analyse du caractère épistémologique de l'intuition yogique est toutefois controversée. En effet, bien que celle-ci consiste en une pleine compréhension d'un concept (i.e. les quatre nobles vérités), Dharmakīrti insiste sur le fait que, due à sa clarté, l'intuition yogique doit être considérée comme une catégorie de sensation qui, par définition, est non-conceptuelle et appréhende le particulier. Ce mémoire est une analyse du traitement que Dharmakīrti fait de l'intuition yogique comme un type de cognition permettant de connaître les concepts d'une manière non-conceptuelle.

Contents

Acknowledgements iv

Abbreviations v

Technical terms vi

Introduction 1
0.1 Yogic intuition and its problems . . . 1
0.2 Methodology and outline . . . 4

1 Epistemology and the Buddhist religious path 7
1.1 Religion and epistemology . . . 8
1.1.1 Epistemology and Buddhism . . . 13
1.1.2 Beginnings of Buddhist epistemology . . . 17
1.2 Dharmakīrti's principles of knowledge . . . 19
1.2.1 Reality and efficiency . . . 20
1.2.2 Novelty . . . 22
1.2.3 Cognition-centricity in Dharmakīrti's system . . . 24
1.2.4 Number of pramāṇas . . . 28
1.3 Summary . . . 31

2 Dharmakīrti's theory of sensation 35
2.1 Sensory cognition . . . 36
2.1.1 The object of sensory cognition . . . 36
2.2 Mental sensation . . . 40
2.2.1 Object of mental sensation . . . 42
2.2.2 Twofold nature of mental sensation . . . 46
2.2.3 On knowing knowledge . . . 52
2.2.4 Perceptual judgement: result of mental sensation . . . 55
2.3 Non-conceptuality of sensation . . . 61
2.4 Non-errancy of sensation . . . 67
2.5 Summary: making sense of sensation . . . 69

3 Dharmakīrti on yogic intuition 73
3.1 What is yogic intuition? . . . 74
3.1.1 The practice of meditation . . . 77
3.2 Problem with yogic intuition . . . 79

3.2.1 Meditation on perceptual objects 87
3.2.2 Meditation on conceptual objects 88
3.2.3 Solution: self-awareness 91
3.3 Validation of yogic intuition 93
3.4 Summary 96

Conclusion 98

References 101

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Abbreviations

AK	*Abhidharmakośa*
AKBh	*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*
HB	*Hetubindu*
NB	*Nyāyabindu*
NBh	*Nyāyabhāṣya*
NBTD	*Nyāyabinduṭīka* of Dharmottara
NBTV	*Nyāyabinduṭīka* of Vinītadeva
NS	*Nyāyasūtra*
PS	*Pramāṇasamuccaya*
PSV	*Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti*
PV	*Pramāṇavārttika*
PVBh	*Pramāṇavārttikabhāṣya*
PVin	*Pramāṇaviniścaya*
PVSV	*Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti*
PVV	*Pramāṇavārttikavṛtti*
Tib.	Tibetan
TS	*Tattvasaṅgraha*
TBh	*Tarkabhāṣā*
Skt.	Sanskrit
SP	*Sambandhaparīkṣa*
SS	*Santānânantarasiddhi*
Vis	*Visuddhimagga*
VN	*Vādanyāya*

Where an abbreviation is followed by Arabic numerals (e.g. PVV 201.14), reference is to the page and line numbers. Upper-case Roman numeral references (e.g. PV II:281) are to chapter and verse numbers. Lower-case letters (e.g. PV II:281ab) indicate *pādas*.

Technical terms

abhrānta	Non-errancy.
ajñātârtha-prakāśa	Revealing of an unknown thing; novelty.
anātman	Non-self.
anitya	Impermanence.
anumāna	Inference.
anvaya	Association.
anyâpoha	Exclusion of the opposite.
artha-kriyā	Efficiency either in the sense of the capacity to cause cognition or in the sense of the capacity to fulfill a human purpose.
artha-sārūpya	Object-appearance.
avisaṁvādi	Reliable.
bhāvanā	Meditation, mental discipline.
bhāvanā-mayī-prajñā	Wisdom resulting from the practice of meditation.
cintā-mayī-prajñā	Wisdom resulting from critical thinking.
duḥkha	Discontent, painfulness, suffering.
grāhaka	Apprehending cognition, cognitive aspect of a mental phenomena.
grāhya	Apprehensible object, content of cognition.
indriya-pratyakṣa	Sensory cognition.
kalpanā	Concept, judgement.
kalpanâpoḍha	Devoid of judgement or concept.
kṣaṇa	Moment, momentary (*kṣaṇika*).
mānasa-pratyakṣa	Mental sensation.
nirvikalpa	Non-conceptual, non-judgemental.
paramâṇu	Atom.
pramāṇa	Knowledge, means of knowledge, valid cognition.
pramāṇa-samplava	Philosophical position according to which each means of knowledge is active in the other's domain of operation.

pramāṇa-vyavasthā	Philosophical position according to which each means of knowledge is restricted to its own domain of operation.
pratītya-samutpāda	Dependent origination.
pratyakṣa	Sensation.
saṁvādi	Reliable.
savikalpa	Conceptual, judgemental.
sāmānya-lakṣaṇa	Universal property.
spaṣṭa	Vivid, vividness.
sphuṭa	Vivid, vividness.
sva-lakṣaṇa	Particular property.
sva-saṁvedana	Self-awareness.
śamatha	Tranquillity, tranquillity meditation.
śruta-mayī-prajñā	Wisdom resulting from learning or study.
vikalpa	Concept.
vipaśyanā	Insight, insight meditation.
vyatireka	Dissociation.
yogi-pratyakṣa	Yogic intuition.

Introduction

As a Buddhist philosopher interested in the theories of knowledge and reasoning, Dharmakīrti (600–660 C. E.) took a very different approach to yogic intuition from that of the Buddha, whose main concern was probably to give instructions on how to discipline the mind in order to generate inner peace. Instead of giving meditation instructions, Dharmakīrti proposed to analyse the nature of the yogic intuition itself as a valid cognitive process and event. His approach was not without problems, however, and the purpose of this thesis is to identify and address some of the inconsistencies in the analysis of yogic intuition which he presented in the most celebrated of his works, the *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV).

0.1 Yogic intuition and its problems

It is Dignāga (480–540 C. E.) who first considered the Buddhist's yogic intuition from an epistemological point of view. He explained the cognition as capable of directly grasping the nature of a thing in itself (i.e. its particularity) independently of a teacher's instruction, and included it under the division of sensation which, with inference, is the only valid means of knowledge accepted by Buddhist epistemologists. According to Dignāga's definition of sensation, yogic intuition is therefore devoid of conceptual construction.

Following in the steps of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti later added that the yogin's intu-

ition is not simply a category of sensation, but more specifically a vivid cognition which results from the practice of meditation on the four noble truths and which has the power to liberate the yogin from the cycle of discontent and rebirth. The centrality of the four noble truths for the realization of *nirvāṇa* is confirmed by Dharmakīrti's commentators Prajñākaragupta (10th century C. E.) and Manorathanandin (10th century C. E.), and we learn from Dharmottara (750–810 C. E.), another of Dharmakīrti's commentators, that the knowledge of their working principles (i.e. impermanence, painfulness and non-self) proceeds in three main stages: (1) what accrues to preliminary study and learning, followed by (2) the outcome of logical investigation, crowned by (3) the fruit of meditation. An important feature of this process is that it is only the clarity of the understanding that differentiates each of those three stages so that there is ultimately no difference between what is known through critical reasoning and what is known through the practice of meditation. As Charlene McDermott (1978, 154) tells us: "the yogin [...] employs a genuine means of valid cognition or *pramāṇa*, which puts him in touch with what he has already ascertained to be real."

There is however a serious problem with this account of yogic intuition; a problem which arises as a result of Dharmakīrti's insistence on the fact that the object of meditation is the four noble truths. For since the four noble truths are by nature conceptual in that they establish causal relations between discontent, craving and ignorance of the principles of impermanence and non-self, they violate the criterion of non-conceptuality that defines sensation, so that there is no warrant for including the yogin's intuition among the categories of sensation. Yet, Dharmakīrti clearly states that his version of yogic intuition qualifies as a category of sensation. Does this mean that the four noble truths are only a means to another cognition which is itself non-conceptual and grasps a particular as opposed to a universal property? Probably

not, since according to Dharmakīrti the ultimate yogic intuition, the one which is conducive to *nirvāṇa*, consists in a thorough understanding of these four truths. It could perhaps be argued that the penetration of the four noble truths becomes so clear that the cognition loses its conceptual and universal character. Yet, how vivid can a cognition be so that while being about universals and conceptual processes, it would be devoid of all the features of a universal such as generality, vagueness and, most of all, association with words and concepts? For this is precisely the condition that the yogic intuition must fulfill if it is to be regarded as a category of sensation; the intuition, as a sensation, must be a thorough non-conceptual understanding of concepts. The task of Dharmakīrti is therefore to show that the practice of meditation has the power to transform concepts into particulars, and unless he succeeds in this effort his treatment of yogic intuition will have to be rejected as inconsistent.

An altogether different problem with yogic intuition regards its validation process. For even if an intuition were non-conceptual and vivid, this does not guarantee that it is in accordance with reality. Moreover, considering that the great majority of Indian mystics, religious seekers and philosophers based their claims about reality on a yogic intuition of some kind arrived at through meditation practices similar to those of the Buddhists, and considering that their conclusions were utterly different, notably about the existence of a permanent self which the Buddhists were alone in denying, it is safe to say that at least some of the religious leaders went astray in their interpretation of reality. But how can we differentiate genuine insights from the hallucinations of charlatans? Can logical consistency constitute such criterion? Are there any others? Was Dharmakīrti dogmatic when it came to scrutinizing the intuitions of Buddhist and non-Buddhist yogins?

These are the two problems inherent to Dharmakīrti's treatment of yogic intuition

which this thesis proposes to address.

0.2 Methodology and outline

On the whole, the arguments presented below are the result of reading, in Sanskrit, various sections of the chapter on sensation of the *Pramāṇavārttika* and some of its commentaries, in order to get a general understanding of Dharmakīrti's theory of sensation and then to see how yogic intuition fits into the general picture. Considering that most of PV has yet to be translated in a modern language, this approach was sometimes challenging.

Fortunately, other works by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti have been translated into English and have been useful guides in the realization of my project and my understanding of Dharmakīrti's thought. Particularly helpful were the recent translation of the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter of PV by Roger Jackson (1993), the two translations of Dharmakīrti's *Nyāyabindu* (NB) (Stcherbatsky 1930, Gangopadhyaya 1971), and Masaaki Hattori's (1968) translation of the chapter on sensation of Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (PS). Translations of works by later exponents of Dharmakīrti's thought such as Śāntarakṣita's (725–780 C. E.) *Tattvasaṅgraha* (Jha 1937–9) and Mokṣākaragupta's (11th–13th century C. E.) *Tarkabhāṣā* (Kajiyama 1965, Singh 1985) have also been of valuable help, as also various studies of different aspects of Dharmakīrti's thought and translations of non-Buddhist works on Indian epistemology. It is important to note at the outset, however, that very little scholarship has been devoted to the concept of yogic intuition as understood by Buddhist epistemologists in modern European languages. Except for McDermott's (1978) short article on Dharmakīrti's treatment of yogic intuition in NB and sections of Christian Lindtner's

(1984) article on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (PVin), scholars have tended to ignore Dharmakīrti's presentation of yogic intuition and when they do discuss it, it is only in passing while discussing other issues. So while modern scholarship has undeniably shaped my understanding of Dharmakīrti's thought, what is presented below regarding yogic intuition is mostly the result of my own juggling with the concept.

Logistically, I address the issues in three different sections. First, because the adequacy of epistemological investigation as a step toward spiritual liberation has been questioned by modern scholars and religious practitioners alike, I offer a brief survey of the debate and show that epistemology has indeed its place on the Buddhist path. Having done that, I give a presentation of Dharmakīrti's general theory of truth and explain how it is related to the goal of Buddhism, i.e. liberation from suffering.

Next, I offer a comprehensive account of Dharmakīrti's theory of sensation in an effort to provide a theoretical context against which to evaluate Dharmakīrti's treatment of yogic intuition. In itself this chapter should be a welcome contribution to modern scholarship since it is a rare attempt to look at Dharmakīrti's theory of sensation as a whole. It consists in an analysis of the definition, object, fruit and validation process of sensation and its various types. As we shall see, this category of cognition is extremely complex, and it is not clear whether it can be considered a means of acquiring knowledge on which we could act towards the fulfilment of a purpose.

Finally, the general theory of sensation having been considered in the second chapter, it is in the third chapter that an examination of yogic intuition truly begins. There, I provide a translation of the important verses of PV dedicated to it, and begin a critical analysis of its definition in order to determine what it is, whether it really meets the criteria of sensation, and whether Dharmakīrti advanced any crite-

rion by means of which we could differentiate faulty intuitions from those that are true. In other words, what I hope to achieve in this chapter is to determine whether yogic intuition is at all different from inferential knowledge, and whether Dharmakīrti, in attacking the views and intuitions of non-Buddhists and defending the intuition of the Buddha, was the victim of his own prejudices or whether his criticisms were justified. This chapter is thus aimed at understanding the nature of yogic intuition as Dharmakīrti defined it.

To recapitulate, Dharmakīrti developed an elaborate system of epistemology in which yogic intuition is recognized as a valid means of acquiring knowledge. Through an analysis of the epistemological character of yogic intuition and some of its obscure aspects, I hope to come to a better understanding of Dharmakīrti's epistemology and assess his whole system: is he promoting doctrinalism or critical, philosophical analysis?

Chapter 1

Epistemology and the Buddhist religious path

> Given propositions whose truth is vital yet difficult to prove, religious people often find themselves appealing to the notion that religious truth-claims somehow are different than other sorts of truth-claims, and therefore may be accepted as true without recourse to argument or demonstration of the sort demanded of ordinary truth-claims (Jackson 1993, 81).

Considering that religion proposes to answer the most fundamental of our aspirations, i.e. the conquest of happiness, it is indeed curious that the most extreme cases of dogmatism be associated with its practice. For if there is one area where one should critically examine the metaphysical conclusions that are drawn on the basis of certain testimonies and personal experiences, it is where such conclusions can have an impact on one's achievement of happiness. Yet, religious practitioners tend to dismiss the entire enterprise of critical thinking when it comes to scrutinizing their beliefs, and even go as far in their dogmatism as to ridicule those who wish to bring some sense into the study and practice of religion. In this chapter I hope to show that due to the character of the questions to which religion proposes universal solutions, religious truth-claims must be critically examined before they can be embraced as valid. My motive for advancing arguments in favour of critical thinking is not, however, to put every religious truth-claim to the test. Rather, I wish to show that epistemological

investigations are perfectly compatible with religion since the purpose of epistemology is to clarify what is meant by "truth" and to discover the ways in which it can be acquired and demonstrated. In that sense, epistemology has a lot to offer to religious practitioners insofar as it provides them with a method by means of which they can justify their beliefs and make them acceptable even to the non-believer. Having shown the importance of epistemology on any religious path, I then look at how Buddhists have responded to the challenge and give a general account of Dharmakīrti's theory of truth, arguing that his undertaking was perfectly compatible with the spirit of Buddhism.

1.1 Religion and epistemology

If we look at the history of Western philosophy, we find that intellectuals have advanced three main defining criteria of truth: correspondence to reality, internal coherence, and practicality. Briefly, the correspondence theorist considers a belief to be true if it corresponds to reality; the coherence theorist if it does not contradict other beliefs; and the pragmatist if it leads to a successful action. Historically, both the coherence and pragmatic theories have arisen in response to sceptics who challenged the possibility of ever establishing correspondence between thought and reality (Ajdukiewicz 9–21). But while strict correspondence to a reality external to the belief system under examination is a difficult thing to ascertain, the coherence and pragmatic definitions of truth have other weaknesses which become evident when they are used to explain the conviction with which religious followers claim to be in possession of truth. Indeed, according to the coherence theory two different explanations of a given phenomenon are equally acceptable as long as they are free of internal

inconsistencies, while according to the pragmatic theory two completely different sets of belief are equally true, and in fact are equivalent, if when acted upon they lead to the same result. It is clear, however, that such relativism is not welcomed by the religious person in whose mind her truth-claims are not only efficient and coherent, but also without a doubt correspond to the way things really are. Some will argue that in our age of religious pluralism people have grown to be more tolerant of other systems of belief, and are willing to admit that theirs is only one of many ways to attain peace and know reality, so that religious followers subscribe to some form of coherence and/or pragmatic theories of truth. Traditionally, however, religious devotees can do without relativism since they believe that their faith is THE truth and that other traditions are at best incomplete, at worst totally wrong. So while the absence of contradictions and the capacity to lead to the fulfilment of a goal are qualities to be sought after by any system of truth whether religious, scientific or philosophical, we must conclude that "[t]he correspondence theory is at the heart of what religious people traditionally have meant by 'truth,' and—arguably—it must remain at the heart of any comprehensive world-view if that view is to be considered religious" (Jackson 1993, 42).

Given this strong concern for truth and the certainty with which religious truth-claims are promoted, it should not be surprising if religious people were also concerned "with establishing the foundations for secure knowledge, for without such foundations truth cannot be grasped firmly" (Jackson 1993, 101). A sincere interest in epistemology should in fact be an integral part of the religious quest, since it is only through epistemological investigations that a tradition can validate its assertions and justify the means by which they were discovered. Unfortunately, it is only a minority of religious philosophers who welcome epistemology and its testing apparatus. More often

than not, religious people reject logic as a very inadequate instrument for testing their truth-claims and emphasize that their own experience is the only evidence they need. If their assertions purported to objects of everyday experience to which we all had equal access regardless of our religious beliefs, this argument from experience would satisfy the epistemologist since he accepts sensation, or direct experience, as a valid means of knowing. Yet, the object of religious experience is usually, maybe even always, beyond the reach of the senses and cannot be known directly. Experience thus cannot be a sufficient warrant of religious truth, for otherwise the experience of all religious visionaries would have to be accepted as true, regardless of the fact that they often contradict each other. We have no choice, then, but to appeal to logical consistency to differentiate truth from falsehood in matters of religious beliefs, since it is the domain of logic to test the validity of statements the object of which is not directly accessible to the senses[1]. But the religious practitioners are not so easily convinced and, as Jackson (1993, 81–5) has shown, they offer as many as three main arguments against any attempt to test their doctrines by means of logic.

(1) The first argument is that language is inadequate to describe the object and experience at the core of religion, so that no mundane method is adequate to test religious assertions and, therefore, no refutation of any concept used in the elaboration of a religious doctrine really puts the system or any of its aspects in jeopardy. This appeal to the ineffability of the religious experience is problematic, however, since we

[1]Incidentally, Dharmakīrti opens one of his works with the following sentence: "This work is composed in order to explain inference briefly, because the knowledge of things hidden from the senses depends upon it" (Tib. *don lkog tu gyur pa sgrub pa'i rten ni rjes su dpag pa nyid yin pas de bey brag tu rtogs par bya ba'i phyir mdor bsdus nas 'di brtsam mo*. Skt. *parokṣârtha-pratipatter anumānâśrayatvāt tad-vyutpādanârtham saṁkṣepata idam ārabhyate*) (HB 30–1). Note here that I have followed Turrell Wylie's system of transliteration (Wylie 1959) for all references to Tibetan texts given throughout the thesis, taking the liberty of modifying even quotes from authors who had used a different system of transliteration.

are now faced with the absurd consequence that if a teaching is ineffable, it must necessarily be true. Even more problematic, perhaps, is the fact that the argument defeats itself and does not at all serve its supporter. Indeed, if a religious experience were totally ineffable, it would be wrong to assume that any religious doctrine or any testimony of a religious experience is true, since by the very fact of verbalizing one's experience and proclaiming it to be truth, one proves oneself ignorant in the matter. Consequently, all religious teaching is refuted—including the one propounded by those arguing from ineffability—, and the role of expert is now upheld by none other than those who have not a single word to say about the matter—in which case it becomes impossible to know what truth is really all about. It is unlikely, however, that any religious person will accept such conclusions; she will instead continue to believe in the value of the doctrine to which she subscribes. Which is to show, therefore, that even those arguing from ineffability do not believe religious experiences to be completely ineffable. Instead, what they probably mean by ineffability is that it is very difficult to relate one's religious experience and that no explanation can ever capture its full meaning. In this case, however, ineffability is completely meaningless since all our experiences are, to some extent, ineffable. For example, no description of tasting an apple will match the sensation of biting into the apple oneself. It is possible that religious experience is more difficult to describe than other human experiences, but that is not to say that it is ineffable. And in the event that one chooses to relate one's experience and postulate it as corresponding to the way things really are, we are perfectly justified to test the adequacy of the analogies used to describe the experience and the conclusions that are derived from it, just as we would do for any other experience.

(2) Another argument is that religious propositions are not ineffable but simply

belong to a different class and, as a result, cannot be expected to undergo the same rigorous confirmation procedures as do scientific claims, for example. Such attitude, however, is a return to dogmatism since it suggests that a religious doctrine is to be tested according to its own criteria, which are often non-existent aside from the argument from experience or, in case they do exist, are counterintuitive. Moreover, asserting that as long as a system is internally coherent, it must be true has as its consequence that no competing religious truth is better than the other. As we have seen above, however, religious pluralism is accepted only in principle, and a religious person means more than internal coherence when she asserts the ultimate validity of her beliefs. This argument must therefore be abandoned since it only serves to avoid having to prove one's assertions and does not contribute to the least to the discovery of truth.

(3) Finally, a third argument against having to defend a religious position is that nothing can absolutely be verified or falsified by means of reasoning since the laws of logic make strong presuppositions and assumptions the validity of which is far from established. As a result, logic is dismissed as a tool for establishing truth and refuting falsehood. And ironically, scepticism, which has long been the enemy of religious dogma, now serves the cause of religion. But since pure scepticism defeats itself, it is an attitude that does not bring the debate to an end. Moreover, even if the value of logic were put into question, this does not imply that religious truth-claims are more likely to be true. And even if we admit—as we must—that our tools of evaluation are limited, religious truth-claims are meant to correspond to the real nature of things and, if for that reason alone, we ought to evaluate those claims in the hope of coming to a general agreement as to which metaphysical elaborations are more likely to correspond to reality. So this third argument must also be abandoned.

> Therefore, regardless of whether religious visions involve perception of the truth (and they may very well), claims made strictly on the basis of them cannot have the same general evidential weight as do claims that can be checked either intersubjectively or against more common types of subjective experience—for, unless we are to accept a total relativism that is as unsatisfactory to the religious philosopher as to the scientist, we must (and we do, instinctively) accord greater weight to evidence that is *more* disinterestedly gathered, *more* subject to intersubjective checking, *more* buttressed by ordinary perceptions and the inferences based on those perceptions (Jackson 1993, 97).

1.1.1 Epistemology and Buddhism

The doctrines of Buddhism are no exception to what has been said so far about the necessity to demonstrate religious truth-claims. What is exceptional about Buddhism is perhaps the fact that from the very beginning it showed little resistance to the critical evaluation of religious doctrines. Indeed, we find in the very first *sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Brahmajāla-sutta*, a portrayal of the Buddha as involved in the refutation of as many as sixty-two misconceptions of reality. And in another short *sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the *Kesaputta-sutta*, the Buddha is portrayed as advising the Kālāmas not to accept any religious doctrine out of reverence for the teacher, but rather to see for themselves whether the doctrine made sense and whether it really worked. There is in fact evidence for this tendency to employ critical thinking as an important tool toward the discovery of religious truth even in the doctrines of Buddhism; more specifically in the formulation of the noble eightfold path.

As it is clearly spelled out in the first two components of the path—right view and right thinking—, in order to experience total peace of mind, a Buddhist must first know which views to shun and which to cultivate, which virtues to practise and which vices to avoid. More specifically, right view consists in a genuine understanding of the four noble truths, which is achieved at the intellectual level by a critical examination of

their validity and the subsequent abandoning of all conflicting views, and then at the experiential level by purifying the mind through the perfection of wisdom—an insight into the truths of impermanence, discontent and non-self. Right thinking in turn consists in aspiring to achieve supreme enlightenment and cultivate the mental habits that are beneficial to the achievement of this goal (i.e. morality and concentration); it demands that one critically examine one's character in order to distinguish those habits and modes of action that are beneficial to one's spiritual quest from those that are not. In short, the perfection of both right view and right thinking requires more than faith in the doctrine: it requires knowledge. In this respect, it is crucial for the Buddhist to be able to differentiate between what is knowledge and what is not, so that epistemology, because it provides the criteria and instruments necessary for the investigation of knowledge, is a most welcome tool in the perfection of these elements of the Buddhist path. It is not surprising, therefore, that Buddhists of classical India faced the challenge head on and went on to develop their own system of epistemological investigation. In fact, one can only wonder why it took a thousand years before they became interested in theories of sensation and reasoning.

But even in the face of such evidence from the tradition, scholars and practitioners have debated the adequacy of the Buddhist philosophers' attempts to find criteria against which they could measure their beliefs in order to determine which ones are relatively certain and which are not. As Ernst Steinkellner (1982) and Richard Hayes (1988, 9–36) have shown, opinions diverge and, even when they welcome systematic, critical thinking, in addition to formal meditation, as a means of eliminating false views and clear the way for truth (e.g. Stcherbatsky 1932, Warder 1980), modern scholars have tended to see Buddhist epistemology as a purely secular movement. Steinkellner (1982, 6) writes: "the assumption common to all these approaches is

that the epistemological tradition presents an essential deviation from the spirit of Buddhism." But such mixed reception of Buddhist epistemology is perhaps due to an inability to realize that the Buddha was probably aware of the pitfalls of the argument from experience, and would have welcomed the use of epistemology—had it been developed in his own days—if only to denounce charlatans by showing that reliance on testimonies cannot provide secure knowledge. His discussion of the three levels of wisdom is in fact yet another example of the Buddha's openness to critical thinking as an important element on the path to liberation. These three levels are respectively (1) the wisdom that accrues to learning, i.e. hearing or reading about the path (*śruta-mayī-prajñā*); (2) the one that accrues to logical investigation or critical thinking (*cintā-mayī-prajñā*); and finally (3) the one that accrues to the practice of mental discipline or meditation (*bhāvanā-mayī-prajñā*) [2]. In other words, between the stages of learning about the Dharma and applying it in one's life by purifying the mind through the practice of meditation, the Buddha recognized the necessity to try to arrive at an intellectual understanding of the doctrine. That is to say, while the first stage is necessary, mere faith in the doctrine without ever investigating its validity and applying its principles in one's life does not bring any benefit to the religious seeker. That this was the Buddha's position is attested by his repeated invitations to come and see the truth of Dharma for oneself. Also, that the correct practice of mental purification that occurs in meditation cannot be expected of one who has no understanding of the doctrine is attested by the mention of this middle stage of

[2]The *Saṅgīti-sutta* (*sutta* 33 of the *Dīgha Nikāya*) says, for example: "Three more kinds of wisdom: based on thought, on learning [hearing], on mental development [meditation] (*cintāmayā paññā, sotamayā paññā, bhāvanāmayā paññā*)" (Walshe 486). It must be noted here that wisdom (*prajñā*) in the context of Buddhism is more than the ability to discern inner qualities or relationships, and it is more than good sense. In the minds of Buddhists, wisdom is intimately linked with certainty (*niścaya*), which is its most characteristic manifestation.

critical thinking. So before embarking on the practice of Dharma (or simultaneously with one's practice), one is to examine the tenets of Buddhism and develop a deep and critical understanding of how they can contribute to liberation. Furthermore, one is to examine one's character in order to abandon counterproductive mental habits and develop those that are beneficial to one's quest. It is in the perfection of this second category of wisdom that the science of epistemology is most helpful. And since it was encouraged—though not developed—even in the oldest of the Buddhist scriptures, we have to admit that epistemology is perfectly compatible with the spirit of Buddhism.

In this respect, it must further be realized that while the Buddha appealed to personal experience as a valid—and in fact the most valid—method of testing a religious doctrine, his motivation for doing so was utterly different from that of the person who refuses to have her beliefs tested and argues that the value of her truth-claims will remain unaffected by the test of critical thinking. The difference lies in the fact that while the latter is opposed to any form of critical examination of her beliefs, the Buddha insisted that one should not accept his doctrine uncritically but should instead test its validity both through thinking and practice. This preference for critical examination over reverential acceptance of the words of any religious expert was convincingly shown by Hayes (1988, 41–62) to be present throughout the Buddhist tradition that preceded the emergence of a typically Buddhist system of epistemology. Accordingly, we must admit that Buddhist epistemology, which is nothing more than a systematization of the rational scepticism inherent to Buddhism and a perfection of the tools to be used in the development of the second type of wisdom known as *cintā-mayī-prajñā*, deserves its place as an element of the path to enlightenment—as long as its pursuit does not become an end in itself which supersedes the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.

1.1.2 Beginnings of Buddhist epistemology

It is to Dignāga that we owe the introduction of epistemology in the Buddhist religion. While it is undeniable that the Abhidharma tradition had already made very systematic attempts to establish truth and eliminate vain opinions in the first centuries of Buddhist history, it is he, following the steps of his forefather Vasubandhu (400–480 C. E.), who was the first to advance criteria and to develop methods by means of which beliefs could be tested and justified; thus he made possible the leap from the status of true belief to that of knowledge, from certainty acquired by faith in the words of a religious figure to certainty acquired through reasoning. He accomplished this mainly in his *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, which investigates various aspects of sensation and inference. Unfortunately, PS is available to us today only in its Tibetan translation; the Sanskrit original having been lost to history. This very important work has been partially translated into English by Hattori (1968) and Hayes (1988).

As Vittorio Van Bijlert (1989, 1–44) has shown, Dignāga was not only indebted to Vasubandhu for his contribution to Indian epistemology, but also to the old Nyāya tradition and especially to the *Nyāyabhāṣya* (NBh) of Vātsyāyana (450-500 C. E.), whose commentary on the *Nyāyasūtra* (NS) can be regarded as the first treatise on epistemology and logic in India. In fact, the Naiyāyikas were probably the first to claim that epistemology was a necessary, though not a sufficient, cause of emancipation. NS 1 says: "It is the knowledge of the real essence (or true character) of the following sixteen categories that leads to the attainment of the Highest Good—(1) The Means of Right Cognition; (2) The Objects of Right Cognition [...]" (Jha 1912-9, I, 37). Aside from the Naiyāyikas, Dignāga also borrowed many of his ideas from the grammatical schools, most of all from his contemporary Bhartṛhari (c. 5th century

C. E.) (Herzberger 1986).

Using Dignāga as a starting point, the tradition later climaxed in the works of his follower Dharmakīrti, whose central role in the sophistication of epistemology and logic, both Buddhist and otherwise, is attested by the vast commentarial tradition that surrounds his work. But although he has had a tremendous influence on the philosophical thought of India, and later of Tibet, little is known about Dharmakīrti's life. If we accept the legendary accounts found in the Tibetan tradition (Chattopadhyaya 224–48; Stcherbatsky 1932, 34–7), Dharmakīrti was born in south India from a well-educated family of Brahmanic faith. Well versed in Brahmanic philosophy, he eventually converted to Buddhism and went to Nālandā to receive Buddhist ordination and begin his study of epistemology. There, after surpassing his own teacher, Īśvarasena, in his mastery of Dignāga's PS, he was invited to write a commentary on that work, his *Pramāṇavārttika*, an event which marked the beginning of his career as a writer of Buddhist epistemological treatises.

Aside from PV, his first and most highly regarded work, Dharmakīrti is credited the authorship of at least six other treatises. These are the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (PVin) and *Nyāyabindu* (NB), which are regarded as later abridgments of PV; the *Hetubindu* (HB), *Sambandhaparīkṣa* (SP) and *Vādanyāya* (VN), respectively dealing with the logic of syllogism, the problem of logical relations and debate; and finally, the *Santānântarasiddhi* (SS), a refutation of solipsism in the Yogācāra school. Lindtner (1980) has also suggested that two more works be added to Dharmakīrti's credentials: the *Tattvaniṣkarṣa*, which would have been his first work, and the *Laukikapramāṇaparīkṣa*, but I haven't encountered anything to the effect that his thesis had been accepted or challenged by any other scholars. Regardless of the authority of these last two texts, however, PV remains Dharmakīrti's main work where, following the steps

of his mentor Dignāga, he embarks on a discussion of reality and the various forms of knowledge. In the first chapter he spells out his theory of inference and language, which he applies in the second chapter to a polemical discussion of the authority of the Buddha as a religious teacher. Next comes a discussion of sensation and its various kinds, and finally a chapter on syllogistic logic[3]. Dharmakīrti himself wrote an extensive commentary on the chapter of PV dealing with inference.

1.2 Dharmakīrti's principles of knowledge

In the light of what has been said so far about the importance of epistemological investigation in the context of proving the veracity of one's religious truth-claims, we may begin our analysis of Dharmakīrti's system of epistemology by asking how he defined truth. Perhaps the most popular of his definitions of truth is found at NB I:1, where it is presented as that which precedes all successful human action[4]; those actions being motivated by the search for the desirable and the avoidance of the objectionable[5]. This verse therefore suggests that truth, or knowledge, has occurred

[3]I here give the order of chapters suggested by Erich Frauwallner (1954) and followed by all of Dharmakīrti's commentators except for Manorathanandin, who commented on all the chapters of PV which he reorganized as follows: (1) authority of the Buddha, (2) sensation, (3) inference, (4) syllogism. Note that all subsequent references to PV follow the order of chapters offered by Manorathanandin (Pandeya 1989).

[4]NB I:1: *samyag-jñāna-pūrvikā sarva-puruṣârtha-siddhir tad vyutpādyate* (The attainment of all human purpose is preceded by right cognition. [Therefore] it is examined.). We can get a similar idea from PVin I:30.17f, which Dreyfus (1991, 28) translates as "[Perception and inference are right cognitions] because [a person] who acts (*'jug pa na*) having determined (*yongs su bcad nas*) the object by means of these two (cognitions) is not deceived with regard to a purposeful action [performed by the object]" (*de dag gis don yongs su bcad nas 'jug pa na don bya ba la slu ba med pa'i phyir*).

[5]Vinītadeva (8th century C. E.) mentions a third category of object: the one towards which we are indifferent (NBTV 5.3–15). But Dharmottara suggests that there are only two: "An object is either fit to be abandoned or desirable because the objectionable object is wished to be abandoned [and] also, the desirable [object is wished] to be obtained. And there is no object other than the objectionable and the desirable because what is to be disregarded is objectionable due to the very fact that it is not desirable" (NBTD 30.1–3: *heyo 'rthaḥ upādeyo vā, heyo hi artho hātum iṣyate upādeyo 'pi upādātum. na ca heyôpādeyābhyām anyo rāśir asti, upekṣanīyo hi an-upādeyatvāt heya eva.*).

when our apprehension of the object is an accurate representation of its real nature, for only an accurate representation of an object will lead to successful action. Dharmakīrti gives a more explicit definition of knowledge at PV I:3ac;7c; a definition that nonetheless gave tremendous difficulty of interpretation to his commentators and still puzzles modern scholars. The Sanskrit reads:

> pramāṇam avisaṁvādi jñānam arthakriyā-sthitiḥ
> avisaṁvādanaṁ (3ac).
> ajñātârtha-prakāśo vā (7c).

Recently, Georges Dreyfus (1991) seems to have hit upon the most, and perhaps the only, sensible interpretation of this passage in his analysis of mKhas grub's (1385–1438 C. E.) commentary on PV. As Dreyfus shows, mKhas grub looked carefully at all the possible antecedents of verse 7c and arrived at the conclusion that Dharmakīrti meant to define knowledge as a cognition that is always reliable, for it either leads to the fulfilment of a purpose or reveals something new; he thus took reliability (*avisaṁvādanaṁ*), and not valid cognition (*pramāṇa*), to be the missing antecedent of PV I:7c. The verses should accordingly be translated as follows:

> pramāṇam avisaṁvādi jñānam arthakriyā-sthitiḥ
> avisaṁvādanaṁ (3ac).
> ajñātârtha-prakāśo vā (7c).
>
> [3ac] Valid cognition is a cognition that is reliable. Reliability [consists] in being conducive to the fulfilment of a purpose. [7c] Or, [reliability] is the revealing of a [yet] unknown thing.

1.2.1 Reality and efficiency

The first observation to be made about the above definition of knowledge (or truth) regards the importance that Dharmakīrti accords to the concept of efficiency not only as a defining characteristic of truth in the sense of human beliefs, but also of

truth in the sense of reality independent of the human will. Indeed, for Dharmakīrti the ultimately real is defined in terms of causal efficiency; that is, what is capable of producing an effect is real in the ultimate sense, while that which lacks causal efficiency is only provisionally real—or even pure illusion. To be is therefore to be efficient.

> sa pāramârthiko bhāvo ya evârthakriyā-kṣamaḥ (PV III:166cd).
>
> The thing that is capable of fulfilling a purpose (or producing an effect) is real in the ultimate sense.
>
> arthakriyā-yogya-lakṣaṇaṁ hi vastu (HB 3.14).
>
> For a real thing is characterized by the capacity to fulfill a purpose (or produce an effect).
>
> arthakriyā-sāmarthya-lakṣaṇatvāt vastunaḥ (NB I:14).
>
> Because a real thing is characterized by the capacity to fulfill a purpose (or produce an effect).

As Seitatsu Moriyama (1991, 206–7) noted, however, this definition of reality did not make unanimity among Buddhists, especially among the Mādhyamikas for whom efficiency was tantamount to a thing that is dependently produced and thus cannot hold under close scrutiny. For Mādhyamikas such as Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, Dharmakīrti's definition of reality was therefore only a second-rate reality; at its best a correct conventional truth. But unlike the Mādhyamikas, Dharmakīrti did not wish to be trapped by the metaphysic of emptiness, and his entire system is based upon the principle of causality. Like them, he recognized that anything that we know and experience is dynamic and dependently produced, but unlike them he realized that what has causal efficiency must be attributed at least some degree of reality—and in fact the highest possible degree of reality since this is all that we can know—for the concept of reality to have any sense at all. Accordingly, he defined reality as the causally efficient. Yet, as Masatoshi Nagatomi (1968) and E. Mikogami (1979)

have shown, Dharmakīrti had more than one idea in mind when he talked about efficiency. This is reflected in the above translations which suggest two ways in which efficiency—and thus reality—is to be interpreted in his writings: (1) in the sense of the capacity to produce an effect and (2) in the sense of the fulfilment of a human purpose. That is to say, Dharmakīrti had an ontological and a pragmatic definition of reality; ontological in terms of what is existent because of its capacity to cause cognition and other natural effects—such as obviating cold, in the case of fire—, and pragmatic as that which can lead to the fulfilment of a human purpose—such as using fire to cook food. And although the ontological and the pragmatic constantly interact in Dharmakīrti's system, one should not misinterpret his application of the criterion of efficiency to the fulfilment of human purposes to mean that he accorded ultimate reality to human activities. Rather, it should be understood as a sign that Dharmakīrti recognized that among our various beliefs some are efficient and some are deceptive, and that deceptive beliefs cannot correspond to reality.

1.2.2 Novelty

A second observation which must be made about the above verses is that in addition to making sensible Dharmakīrti's definition of knowledge, mKhas grub had a more original interpretation of the criterion of novelty than the one proposed by all other commentators. According to him, novelty should not be taken to mean that the object revealed by a given cognition has never been cognized before under any circumstance, but rather that the cognition ascertaining the object does so by means of its own power, not by means of another prior cognitive act, and therefore brings new information to one's continuum of consciousness. In other words, the criterion of novelty applies not to the entire cognitive history of an individual, but rather to a

particular instance of cognition, so that it is met when the cognition has "independent epistemic access to its object", as Dreyfus put it (1991, 20), and doesn't range over the field of operation of another type of cognitive activity. Dreyfus explains (1991, 20):

> For example, a visual perception of my favorite rocking chair has access to its object independently of my previous perceptions of that chair, despite the fact that the information it conveys is not new. A remembrance of that same chair does not have such an epistemical independence, for it is a mere mechanical repetition of the results of a cognition. In short, for mKhas grub, a cognition is valid if, and only if, the experience of the object turns out to bring certainty through its own power....

A sensible advantage of this reading is that it allows for the subsequent and continued cognitions of a given object to count as valid cognitions—something that the traditional reading does not allow because of its misapplication of the requirement of novelty to the object of cognition, as opposed to the nature of the cognitive act. For example, under rGyal tshab's (1364–1432 C. E.) interpretation, which is the most authoritative in Tibet and is also representative of the Indian commentators, my cognition of my favorite chair is a valid cognition only the first time it occurs because all subsequent cognitions of it do not reveal anything new about the chair. For mKhas grub, however, the second and twentieth cognitions of the given chair are just as valid as the first because, in addition to successfully identifying the object as a chair, each reveals the object by its own power and thus brings new information to my continuum of consciousness.

This new meaning of novelty also reveals the twofold character of Dharmakīrti's theory of truth, one epistemological and the other pragmatic; that is, a cognition can be reliable pragmatically if it leads to the fulfilment of a purpose (PV 1:3ac), or (*vā*) epistemologically if it reveals an object that no other cognition can reveal at the

moment (PV 1:7c). Shoryu Katsura (1984) has proposed a similar interpretation of Dharmakīrti's system, but does not seem to have suspected that this is what Dharmakīrti meant to say when he used the disjunctive particle "*vā*" at PV 1:7c[6].

We can summarize Dharmakīrti's definition of knowledge as follows: a cognition is a valid instance of knowledge—and is therefore true—if it correctly identifies its object in terms of place, time and inherent properties by its own power so that if one were to direct one's activities toward that object, the cognition would enable one to fulfill a given purpose.

1.2.3 Cognition-centricity in Dharmakīrti's system

Dreyfus and Lindtner (1989, 35) have suggested that the above definition of knowledge (cf PV I:3ac;7c, page 20) is rather peculiar, for it represents a departure from the traditional usage of the term "*pramāṇa*" to express the most instrumental factor in the acquisition of knowledge, as Vātsyāyana defined it in the opening lines of his NBh: "that by means of which the person obtains the right cognition of the thing is called the 'Instrument of Right Cognition' (*Pramāṇa*)" (Jha 1912–9, 2). When applied to the visual cognition of a pot, for example, Vātsyāyana's definition suggests that it is the eye that is to be considered the *pramāṇa*. For Dharmakīrti, however, it is

[6]For an overview of different Indian and Tibetan interpretations of Dharmakīrti's usage of the disjunctive particle "*vā*" (or) in verse 7c, instead of the conjunctive "*ca*" (and) that nearly all the commentators seem to have expected in his definition of *pramāṇa* (valid cognition), see Dreyfus (1991), Franco (1991) and Lindtner (1991). While Dreyfus supports mKhas grub's interpretation of the given verses, Franco has a rather provocative, though also very plausible, interpretation. He argues that Dharmakīrti is not at all interested in defining *pramāṇa*, but that he rather wants to show how the Buddha is a source of knowledge; that is, the Buddha is a source of knowledge because his words are reliable and because he teaches something thus far unheard of. Lindtner instead suggests that this passage is Dharmakīrti's way of answering, by means of punning, the Buddhist debate between Bhavya (500–570 C.E.) and Dharmapāla (530–561 C.E.) on the problem of the two levels of truth, which had made it impossible to speak sensibly about *paramârtha-satya* and its relation to *saṁvṛtti-satya*. Katsura's (1984) very clear study of Dharmakīrti supports the traditionally accepted interpretation of *pramāṇa* as a cognition that is both reliable and reveals something new, thus taking the disjunctive "*vā*" as a conjunctive "*ca*". Van Bijlert (1989) also takes this position.

cognition itself that is the *pramāṇa*, not the sense faculty. Because of this, Dreyfus and Lindtner have argued that *pramāṇa* is for Dharmakīrti not an instrument of knowledge, but rather an act or instance of knowledge, a piece of cognition. I believe, however, that Dharmakīrti's innovation lies not so much in his usage of the term as in his saying that it is the cognition itself that serves as the most instrumental cause of knowledge as opposed to the sense faculties or some objects external to our consciousness. On my reading, Dharmakīrti's argument goes as follows: even if the senses are functioning properly and even if there is no obstacle to prevent our seeing a pot, we will have a knowledge of the visual stimulus only when its image is actually present in our consciousness. So because it is the cognitive image itself that most decisively differentiates an object from another, it is cognition itself that is the most instrumental cause of knowledge. Dharmakīrti's usage of the term "*pramāṇa*" is therefore in perfect accord with the epistemological tradition already in place.

But his emphasis on the cognition as the instrument of knowledge is counterintuitive. And in fact, it leads him to support an even more peculiar position according to which the instrument, the object and the result of knowledge are all the same, and that their distinction is only the product of our imagination and of a careless analysis of cognitive activity. His argument supporting the identity of the instrument and result of knowledge directly follows from his belief that the instrument of knowledge is the cognition itself. In this case, the resulting knowledge becomes none other than our awareness of that same cognition. The dichotomy instrument–result is therefore overcome by arguing that a cognition, because it is self-luminous (cf page 46), possesses the two aspects of instrumentality and result.

The argument that the instrument and result are also the same as the object of knowledge seems more difficult to support, however, at least if we take a strictly

realist stand. But Dharmakīrti is not a realist, as should have been obvious from his reported emphasis on cognition. Instead, he believes, like his predecessors Vasubandhu and Dignāga, that it is impossible to know the object of cognition in itself as it would stand apart from the consciousness of it. On the contrary, he holds that the only things we can know are the images they project in our consciousness, having no way to verify whether each image is an accurate duplicate of the external object in its minutest details. The only objects of knowledge are therefore our own phenomena of consciousness! Nagin Shah (1981, 256) clearly summarizes how the threefold division of instrument, object and result of knowledge arises out of a unique moment of consciousness:

> Dharmakīrti maintains that in the case of a piece of cognition the means of valid cognition is 'this piece of cognition assuming the form of something-that-grasps (*grāhakabhāva*)', and the result produced is 'this piece of cognition apprehending itself (*svasaṁvedana*)' [PV2:364], the object of valid cognition being 'this piece of cognition assuming the form of something-that-is-grasped (*grāhyabhāva*)'.

Dreyfus and Lindtner (1989) have argued that Dharmakīrti's commitment to the view that the instrument, object and result of knowledge are in fact identical to one another reflects the Yogācāra, by which they mean idealist, nature of his system. Idealist though it may sound, it is very unlikely that Dharmakīrti would support a strong idealism of the kind that Dreyfus and Lindtner want to attribute him, denying the existence of anything external to mind. On the contrary, the fact that Dharmakīrti wrote so much on inference as a way to eliminate false views suggests that he had a wider notion of reality than the pure idealist's, for what would be the use of assuring a correspondence between our beliefs and reality if the only reality were anything that goes on in our mind? Also, the fact that sensation is said to have direct access to reality, while inference only indirectly does so, suggests that the source of cognition

lies outside our consciousness. The most plausible interpretation of Dharmakīrti's system is therefore closer to phenomenalism than to pure idealism. In fact, I suggest that he took a phenomenalist approach because it was phenomenalism that most fitted what he had to convey to his audience; an audience that consisted mostly of ordinary people who had not abandoned their belief in an enduring self.

According to Buddhist doctrine, the belief in a self distorts our experience of reality and, in this respect, prevents our various cognitions from giving an accurate picture of things as they are in themselves. Consequently, those who entertain a belief in a self should realize, says Dharmakīrti, that their cognitions do not correspond to reality and that so far as they distort reality to fit their own needs, all they can know with certainty are their own cognitions, not reality as it stands unaffected by their vested interests. In this respect, the threefold character—instrument, object and result—of the knowledge of those who haven't fully realized and integrated the truth of non-self into their lives should be understood to refer only to their afflicted mental phenomena. Clearly, Dharmakīrti could not have conveyed this message if he had subscribed to realism or idealism, and he was probably aware of the limitations of both of these approaches and the difficulties that they entailed for the Buddhist doctrine of non-self. He realized that if he adopted the position of a pure realist who believes that everything has its own reality (i.e. identity or self), he would have to abandon the theory of non-self, which is incompatible with a system according to which the objects of cognition, the means of cognition and the cognizer are all separately existing realities. On the other hand, if he were to adopt pure idealism, the theory of non-self could hardly stand up against the danger of regarding everything as the manifestation of a bigger self. But that Dharmakīrti was a pluralist who did not believe that everything emanated from a cosmic self is obvious from reading the

most idealist of his writings: the *Santānântarasiddhi*. For these reasons, I believe that Dharmakīrti had to take the middle position of a phenomenalist, and although his emphasis on cognition and his advancing the identity of instrument, object and result of knowledge may give the impression that he subscribed to idealism, I suggest that such an interpretation of his system must be abandoned.

1.2.4 Number of pramāṇas

Having defined *pramāṇa* in terms of cognition-centricity, Dharmakīrti's next move was to describe the various ways in which we can acquire knowledge. In this respect, he recognized only two qualitatively different types of phenomena of consciousness on the basis of which he posited only two kinds of knowing. Translated into the language of undifferentiated moments of consciousness, Dharmakīrti's argument goes as follows: Our phenomena of consciousness belong to two different groups: on the one hand there are vivid cognitions that have the object-appearance of sensible particulars, and on the other hand there are cognitions that have the object-appearance of concepts which ascertain their objects only in a vague and incomplete manner. Therefore, because there are only two kinds of mental phenomena, we can speak of only two kinds of knowing.

This way of presenting Dharmakīrti's position is not, however, the one that the philosopher used to convey his theory, for he did not use the language of mental phenomena. Instead, he advanced his thesis by taking advantage of the "illusory" categories of instrument, object and result of cognition which he himself rejected as belonging to a secondary order of reality—that of those believing in an enduring personality and wrongly taking their understanding of things to correspond to reality. At first, we might think that this tactic is a blatant inconsistency on the part of

Dharmakīrti, since he gives the impression of building a system of epistemology on *a priori* which he does not even accept. But in reality this apparent contradiction is just one among many examples of his discursive method of constantly shifting his level of analysis of reality from the ultimate to the provisional level. When discussing the number of *pramāṇas*, Dharmakīrti first admits that on the provisional level, our experiences are constantly divided up into object, instrument and result of cognition. Then he explains that when we look at knowledge from that perspective, we can identify two objects of cognition: the particular property to which we have direct access through the senses, and the universal property which is ascertained by means of inference. He concludes therefore that sensation and inference are the only two means of knowing.

> na pratyakṣa-parokṣābhyāṁ meyasya anyasya sambhavaḥ
> tasmāt prameya-dvitvena pramāṇa-dvitvam iṣyate (PV II:63).
>
> It is not the case that there exists an object of cognition other than the perceptually present and the perceptually absent. Therefore the fact that there are [only] two means of cognition (*pramāṇas*) is established by the fact that there are [only] two objects of cognition.
>
> mānaṃ dvi-vidhaṃ viṣaya-dvaividhyāt śakty-aśaktitaḥ
> arthakriyāyām (PV II:1ac).
> arthakriyā-samarthaṃ yat tat atra paramârtha-sat
> anyat saṃvṛtti-sat proktam te sva-sāmānya-lakṣaṇe (PV II:3).
>
> There are two means of knowing because there are two types of subject matter, depending on whether it has or lacks the capacity to fulfill a purpose. Here, that which is capable of fulfilling a purpose is real in the highest sense; the other is called real by convention. These two are the particular and the universal [respectively].

Why Dharmakīrti employed illusory categories to prove his point about the number of ways of knowing is very mysterious. One could argue that having stated that we can know only cognitive events—and not the external objects—, Dharmakīrti stepped down to the level of his adversaries only in order to show that even at the conventional

level of reality they did not have a correct understanding of the process of knowing when they advanced, for example, up to six types of *pramāṇa* as the Mīmāṁsikas did. Even so, such shifting from one level of analysis to the other—so typical of Dharmakīrti's discourse—makes the task of reading and thinking about his philosophy discouragingly difficult. In fact, one gets the impression that Dharmakīrti even went as far as developing levels of reality within levels of reality, for he seems to consider facts and theories from an ultimately real conventional level of truth, and a false conventional level, as well as a really ultimate level and a rather provisional ultimate one. His style is enough to give a headache to the most devoted of his followers!

But regardless of the level at which he approached the question, it is clear that Dharmakīrti limited the kinds of knowing to two: sensation and inference. Sensation, as we shall see in the next chapter, has direct epistemic access to its object, the ultimate particular or factual. Inference, however, has indirect, though independent, epistemic access to its object which takes the form of universal properties, i.e. the formal. Yet, it must be reminded that the particular is the object of both sensation and inference. As Katsura (1991, 137) reports, the difference between sensation and inference lies in the fact that one directly ascertains the particular, while the other ascertains it indirectly. Hattori (1968, 80 note 14) comments: "That there are two sorts of *prameya* implies that *sva-lakṣaṇa* is apprehended in two ways, as it is (*sva-rūpena*) and as something other than itself (*para-rūpena*), but not that there is a real *sāmānya* apart from *sva-lakṣaṇa*." This point is another important feature of Dharmakīrti's system, which marks a departure from non-Buddhist epistemologists. According to him, it is impossible for inference to have direct access to the particular, and equally impossible for sensation to grasp universal properties. In other words, sensation and inference have mutually exclusive fields of action. In India, this position

was called *pramāṇa-vyavasthā*. The opposite view, supported by the Naiyāyikas, was called *pramāṇa-samplava*: a position suggesting that the *pramāṇas* are active in each other's domain of operation. If we start with the position that the distinction between instrument, object and result of cognition is unfounded, as Dharmakīrti did, the exclusivity of each mode of knowing to its own field comes down to the bare fact that we have only two clearly qualitatively different types of cognitions—one direct and the other indirect or vague. This, in addition to the criterion of novelty according to which a cognition cannot take an object already ranged over by another cognitive activity, explains Dharmakīrti's disaccord with the Naiyāyikas.

Having stated his position with respect to the number of *pramāṇas*, much of the work of Dharmakīrti consists in an elaborate investigation of the nature of sensation and inference and in the refutation of differing views. In this respect, we can say that in discussing sensation Dharmakīrti is making epistemological claims about the nature of sentient life, while in discussing inference he puts forward a system of critical reasoning which can be used in the refutation of vain opinions. Since this thesis proposes to discuss the epistemology of yogic intuition, a subset of sensation, we need not be concerned too much with the practical science of inference. The next chapter will deal with sensation.

1.3 Summary

As was suggested earlier in this chapter (cf page 16), in the event that epistemology would become an end in itself it would not have a place on the Buddhist path, and could even be rejected as counterproductive for its lack of concern with the attainment of *nirvāṇa*. If we look at the works of the Buddhist epistemologists, however,

we find that their interest in epistemology served the higher purpose of bettering the chances of attaining *nirvāṇa*, which remained their top priority. Admitedly, the above presentation of Dharmakīrti's theory of truth may leave the reader with the impression that Dharmakīrti was an epistemologist for whom religious matters had no significance, but a more thorough examination of his usage of the tools which he and his predecessor developed clearly establishes that he was a Buddhist just as much as an epistemologist.

Hayes (1984) has shown that Buddhist philosophers have made use of the tools of epistemology in at least two ways, both of which have their roots in the pursuit of *nirvāṇa*. The first approach he attributed to Dignāga, the second to Dharmakīrti. In the hands of Dignāga, epistemology becomes an efficient instrument to analyse and test one's many opinions and prejudices, with the determination to abandon whatever viewpoint is unfounded and distorts one's experience of reality. In this respect, Dignāga saw in epistemology a means to perfect the first two elements of the noble eightfold path as was argued earlier (cf page 14). That is to say, Dignāga was more concerned with perfecting the laws of reasoning in order to pinpoint our wrong views than with defending Buddhist doctrine. If a Buddhist could ever have been accused of wasting his energy in secular activities, then it appears that Dignāga could have served as an easy target. And in fact, in response to Steinkellner's (1982) pointing to the opening verse of PS, where homage is given to the Buddha, as a definite sign that Dignāga composed his work as a Buddhist, Van Bijlert (1989, 170–1) has argued that considering the fact that this verse contains the only reference to the Buddha or Buddhist doctrine in the whole of PS, it is understandable that Dignāga's work was interpreted as a departure from Buddhist doctrine. Hayes (1988) has shown, however, that Dignāga's arguments in no way departed from canonical Buddhism

because they aimed at developing instruments by means of which one could identify the fallacies in one's thinking and perfect one's character and understanding of reality. Dignāga therefore provided "one more way of doing so called insight (*vipaśyana*) [sic] meditation, regarded as crucial for the attainment of dispassion and *nirvāṇa*" (Hayes 1988, 168). This identification of critical reasoning with the practice of *vipaśyanā* meditation will be unfamiliar to a majority of meditators who otherwise restrict the use of critical reasoning to the perfection of conceptual knowledge (*cintā-mayī-prajñā*) and use the term "*vipaśyanā*" to refer to formal meditation techniques—such as the mindfulness of the body—which are used in the development of a third kind of wisdom supposedly devoid of concepts, i.e. yogic intuition (or *bhāvanā-mayī-prajñā*). But in his commentary to the section of the *Abhidharmakośa* where Vasubandhu introduces the three types of wisdom (*prajñā*), Yaśomitra suggests that *vipaśyanā* is synonymous with *prajñā* (AK IV:14) so that there is not only the insight (*vipaśyanā*) brought about by mental discipline (*bhāvanā*) to which today's meditators tend to limit themselves, but also that brought about by critical reasoning (*cintā*) to which Hayes referred. Hayes is therefore correct when he says that Dignāga introduced a new way of doing *vipaśyanā* mediation, and we cannot but agree with him (1988, 312) that "[t]he quest for such a *nirvāṇa* was [...] the principal motivation behind Diṅnāga's philosophical presentations."

Dharmakīrti's use of epistemology was altogether different from Dignāga's. His motivation for working in this area becomes clear upon reading the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter of PV, traditionally regarded as a commentary on PS I:1. There he is preoccupied with providing a rational basis for Buddhist doctrine, and engages in polemics the aim of which is to discredit other world views and establish the authority of the Buddha as a religious teacher. So while Dignāga attemped to uproot all our vain

opinions so that we could see reality as it is, Dharmakīrti went further and attempted to prove the value of a specific understanding of reality: the Buddhist understanding of reality. Because of his overt partisanship, Dharmakīrti therefore gives the impression of being more of a dogmatist than a rational sceptic, as was the case for Dignāga (Hayes 1988). But while we must acknowledge the difference in their approach, we must also acknowledge that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti aimed at the same target when they applied their energy to epistemological investigations—although it is Dharmakīrti who gave a religious flavour to the whole enterprise by his defense of Buddhist doctrine. Accordingly we must conclude that no matter how technical and "secular" it often becomes, Buddhist epistemology is a very important aspect of the search for *nirvāṇa*; it serves the perfection of conceptual knowledge, which is essential to experiential knowledge.

Chapter 2

Dharmakīrti's theory of sensation

It was suggested in chapter one that Dharmakīrti regarded sensation to be the most reliable means of knowledge because it eliminates uncertainty through direct apprehension of its object. In this chapter I shall give a more elaborate account of Dharmakīrti's theory of sensation. As we shall see, sensation is for him a non-erroneous, vivid cognition that is devoid of judgement and pertains to an ultimately real object. It proceeds in two general stages: in the first moment there is stimulation of the physical senses by a real object, and in the second moment one's attention is aroused so that it later becomes possible to identify the stimulus and determine the course of action to be taken. To use Dharmakīrti's terminology, these two moments are respectively called sensory cognition and mental sensation and, together with yogic intuition, they form the three types of sensation discussed in his system.

Of those three, sensory cognition is the paradigm upon which Dharmakīrti defines the other kinds of sensation. But the implications of this approach are not all desirable and are sometimes the source of controversies, notably when Dharmakīrti attempts to characterize all instances of sensation as non-conceptual. In this chapter we will investigate sensory cognition and mental sensation, and ask whether they can be regarded

as legitimate cases of sensation according to Dharmakīrti's criteria of vividness, non-conceptuality and non-errancy. The next chapter will ask the same questions with regard to yogic intuition.

2.1 Sensory cognition

According to Dharmakīrti, the most primitive form of knowledge arises in contiguity with the five physical senses and their contact with their respective objects, so that we can speak of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustative and tactile sensations whenever the visual faculty is successfully stimulated by a colour, the auditory faculty by a sound and so forth. As such, his account of sensory cognition is very intuitive if we keep in mind that it corresponds not to what we today call perception, which involves mental processing and recognition of objects, but rather to sensing, which is devoid of any conscious effort of interpretation of the object. Sensory cognition is therefore the simple awareness of things, pure sensing of reality without any interference by concepts.

2.1.1 The object of sensory cognition

As we saw in the first chapter, Dharmakīrti defined reality in terms of the capacity to bring about some result; a criterion which is fulfilled either when an object successfully arouses our senses and causes cognition, or when this cognition can in turn serve for the fulfilment of a given human purpose. Efficiency can therefore apply to the non-conceptual object which is unaffected by our prejudices, or to the conceptual object which enables one to pursue more or less noble desires. In terms of sensation, it is

the former meaning of efficiency that is most important[1].

Starting with the notion that a thing must be cognizable to be real, Dharmakīrti goes on to say that in order to share the capacity to cause cognition, an object must be impermanent since only what is subject to change has the capacity to produce effects. A good example of how he used this line of reasoning can be found at PV I:23–30 where he is arguing against the existence of an eternal creator. The essence of his argument goes as follows: whatever participates as a causal factor in the production of an effect undergoes observable changes in nature, just like the soil and so forth undergo transformations when they serve as a cause of a seedling's arising since the seedling's attributes are observed in the soil's constitution (PV I:27). But since by definition eternal things such as God cannot undergo any change, they cannot have causal efficiency, and the universe cannot have been created by an eternal deity. And this argument applies to causality in general; hence the thesis that whatever is real has causal efficiency and is impermanent. But by impermanent, Dharmakīrti does not only mean that the object will eventually cease to exist. More radically, he means that it ceases to exist at the very moment that it comes into existence, for if it remained unchanged only for a moment this would suggest that during the time that it remained unchanged the object lacked the capacity to produce an effect and was in fact not real at all. Reality, for Dharmakīrti, is therefore the causally efficient moment[2].

> yat sat tat kṣaṇikam eva, akṣaṇikatve 'rthakriyā-virodhāt tal-lakṣaṇaṁ vastutvaṁ hīyate (HB 4.6–7).
>
> Whatever exists lasts but a moment. Since the production of an effect is absent in that which is not momentary, it lacks reality, which is characterized by that

[1]Accordingly, all references to the criterion of efficiency found in this chapter refer to this capacity to cause cognition. The other aspect of efficiency as applicable to human purposes will be dealt with in the next chapter.

[2]For an interesting account of Dharmakīrti's defense of the doctrine of momentariness, see Gupta 1980.

[production of an effect].

This moment of causal efficiency is called a particular in Dharmakīrti's system; it is the object of sensation. In her PhD thesis on the topic, Christine Keyt (1980) distinguished two types of particular—whether it be the object of externally or internally directed sensations—and argued that for Dharmakīrti a particular, as object of sensory cognition, is an external entity capable of generating a vivid representation or image of itself in the mind of the cognizer. Her claim is supported by the following verse:

> grāhyatāṁ viduḥ
> hetutvam eva yuktijñā jñānâkārârpaṇa-kṣamam (PV II:247bd).
> Philosophers know that a real object is unique in being a cause capable to leave its image in cognition.

Keyt went on to show that this efficient entity is in fact an aggregate of more primitive components, the atoms of Dharmakīrti's system; atoms that are very small, but not imperceptible in principle. Moreover, these atoms are qualitative in character inasmuch as there are atoms of colour, taste, etc., which, when aggregated, determine the shape, size and colour of visible objects, for example. It must be remembered, however, that it is only when such an aggregate is capable of stimulating the senses that it is worthy of the appellation "particular". Before that point, we have no awareness of it whatsoever and its existence, as well as that of individual atoms which are not apprehensible through sensation, can only be inferred.

With this distinction between the atom and the particular as an aggregate of atoms, Keyt is directly challenging the view of Theodore Stcherbatsky who, fifty years before her, had claimed that the cognition of extended bodies (or aggregations of atoms) is a sense-illusion because extension is a conceptual construct and never a

reflex. He went on to say that, "The unity of a body, the unity of its parts consisting of a multitude of various atoms, will be an illusion, just as the perception of one forest at a distance instead of the variety of trees of which it is composed is an illusion" (Stcherbatsky 1932, 157). As Keyt (186–92) has shown, however, Stcherbatsky's argument, which led him to coin the expression "mathematical point-instant" to the object of sensory cognition, is a misapplication of Dharmakīrti's theory on the formation of concepts. According to Dharmakīrti, concepts are an imposition of a category on a series of mental events, and without the existence of such a sequence of mental events there cannot be any concept-formation (cf section 2.2.4). But since complex objects such as a visual form are cognized at once, not sequentially but simultaneously, it is wrong to say that the cognition of extended bodies is the result of conceptual activity (Hattori 1968, 26–7; 90 notes 40–1). Besides, were the cognitions of extended bodies conceptual cognitions, even the most primitive cognitions such as seeing, hearing, etc., could not be regarded as instances of sensation. And in fact no cognition whatsoever could be regarded as sensory cognitions since we are never directly aware of single atoms, i.e. of non-complex objects. Keyt's claim that the object of sensory cognition is an aggregate of atomic particles (or qualities) is therefore a welcome correction to Stcherbatsky's interpretation, for it better reflects Dharmakīrti's general epistemological theory.

Another factor which indirectly supports Keyt's position is that the threshold of sensibility that is reached when the aggregate acquires causal efficiency varies with the proximity of the object to the senses[3]. Indeed we find that forms, odours and sounds

[3]NB 1:13: *yasya arthasya saṁnidhānâsaṁnidhānābhyāṁ jñāna-pratibhāsa-bhedas tat svalakṣaṇam* (The object whose appearance in the cognition varies according to proximity or nonproximity [to the senses] is a particular.).

become less distinguishable as they are farther away from the observer, while tastes and touches require actual contact, which is a limiting case of proximity, to be cognized at all. Moreover, since from the observer's point of view it is because the size of the object diminishes as distance increases—or as intensity of contact increases, in the case of tastes and touches—that an object has or lacks causal efficiency, size (or extension) is a factor that facilitates sensory cognition. For unless the object has a certain size relative to the observer, it will not be sensed. When we apply this reasoning to a single atom, we find that individually and independently of its distance to the sense organ, the atom is too small and lacks the power to cause cognition. Therefore, individual atoms are not the objects of sensory cognition; only aggregates whose size is sufficient to stimulate the sense organs are real objects of sensory cognition. Also, because sensory cognition arises at once, at the very moment that the object has reached this threshold of efficiency, aggregations of atoms, as objects of sensory cognition, are not mental constructs.

To summarize, the object of sensory cognition is a momentary aggregate of atoms that is capable of producing a vivid mental image. As a valid means of knowing, sensory cognition is none other than the process by which this mental representation or prototype is produced when the sense organs are stimulated by their respective objects.

2.2 Mental sensation

Dharmakīrti's account of sensory cognition is relatively easy to follow since it more or less corresponds to the function of providing raw cognitive data that we normally attribute to our five physical senses. The situation becomes much more complicated,

however, when we move to the second type of sensation discussed in his system: mental sensation. In fact, mental sensation has been a subject of controversy in the Buddhist epistemological school ever since Dignāga introduced it in PS.

It is possible that Dignāga envisioned the possibility that the mind be able to directly grasp mental objects after having considered how the five physical senses directly grasp external objects, and after acknowledging the fact that the activity of the senses is quite insignificant cognitively unless the information that they provide becomes the object of attention. If this is indeed how he looked into the matter of cognition, Dignāga would have advanced the intermediary category of mental sensation to fill the gap between the physical and the conceptual aspects of knowledge, as Stcherbatsky has suggested (1932, 205). Mental activity would therefore consist not only in the drawing of inferences, but primarily also in the direct knowledge, or sensation, of mental phenomena. In other words, while the physical senses are only capable of participating in sensation, the mind is now capable of both sensation and inference. But regardless of what led Dignāga to advance such theory, it is clear that he recognized mental sensation to be a valid means of knowing. His inquiry into the matter further led him to claim that mental sensation possesses two co-extensive functions: the awareness of the mental object, and self-awareness of the cognitive character of every moment of awareness.

> mānasaṁ cârtha-rāgâdi-svasaṁvittir akalpikā (PS I:6ab).
>
> There is also mental [perception which consists of] the awareness of an object and self-awareness [in such forms as] passion and the like, [both of which are] free from conceptual construction (Nagatomi 1979, 254).

2.2.1 Object of mental sensation

According to Nagatomi (1979, 256), Dharmakīrti's account of mental sensation is quite faithful to Dignāga's. If we take it step by step, Dharmakīrti is saying that sensation as a whole proceeds in the following manner: First there is a stimulation of any one of the five physical senses by its corresponding object. This stage amounts to what we would explain today in terms of physiological processes and neuro-chemical reactions. It produces a mental image of the external stimulus, which image in turn enables mental sensation in the second moment of the cognitive experience when attention is turned to the sensory impression. Unless attention is given to this mental image, the cognitive experience stops at that level and we cannot speak of knowledge, not even sensory knowledge. That is to say, unless attention is aroused, a given sensory cognition is not an efficient and reliable cognition and cannot be regarded as knowledge.

If the sensory cognition is successful, however, mental sensation necessarily occurs and the controversies begin. At this point, the difficulty lies in the fact that there does not seem to be a sufficient ground on which to distinguish the object apprehended by the mind from the one apprehended by the physical senses. And if the two objects are the same, then mental sensation cannot be regarded as a valid source of knowledge since it lacks direct epistemic access to its object which has already been cognized by the senses. As Dharmottara pointed out (Stcherbatsky 1930, 28), it appears that the only situation in which it would be justified to postulate the occurrence of a genuine case of mental sensation would be if the physical sense, after cognizing its object, ceased to function with respect to that aggregation of atoms in the moment immediately following the initial sensation, so that mental sensation would become

necessary for the completion of the cognitive process. Yet, it is a matter of common experience that under most conditions the external object of sensory cognition, while momentary, continues to manifest itself in the form of an object-continuum which efficiently provokes a second and a third sensory cognition. For example, when I see a shape which I later identify as a chair, I do not see the particular shape only for a moment and then have a sensory cognition of empty space in the subsequent moments, which would require me to rely on a purely mental image to identify the object initially cognized. Instead, the shape continues to make its impression on my senses as long as I look at it and until I turn away or someone takes it away from my sight, etc. So since (if) the senses continue to function with respect to a given object-continuum, why not resign ourselves to call this cognition a sensory cognition instead of a mental sensation? On the other hand, if it is proven that the object of mental sensation is sufficiently different from that of sensory cognition to avoid the above criticisms, how are we to explain the incapacity of a blind person to overcome the defect in her physical organs by seeing colours and shapes with her mind?

Dharmakīrti addresses these objections—which the author of the *Nyāyabindu-ṭippanī* attributes to Kumārila (Gangopadhyaya 104, note 26)—in verses 239-48 of PV II. There he explains that the object of mental sensation is not what has already been grasped by the senses, but that it is instead an image of the sensory object formed in the moment immediately following the contact of the senses with their respective objects[4]. In other words, if we remember that the most instrumental cause for knowing an object is the appearance that it takes in consciousness so that it is

[4]This all takes place, of course, in one stream of consciousness, for a situation in which the object of mental sensation would be the image produced in the mind of another person—that is, in a different stream of consciousness—, would be labelled as a case of yogic intuition, not mental sensation (Gangopadhyaya 105, note 26).

the mental image that results from the contact of the senses with their objects that deserves the label "sensory cognition", the object of mental sensation is none other than the sensory cognition itself, when attention is given to it[5]. The violation of the criterion of novelty is thus refuted since mental sensation is not causally dependent only on an aggregation of atoms as its object, but it is instead the result of both the aggregated continuum and its repeated cognition by the senses. That is to say, the external continuum still serves as the support of cognition, but the involvement of the senses as a secondary cause produces a change in consciousness that manifests itself in the form of a mental object different from the external aggregate alone. Having different causes from those of the object of sensory cognition—which is non-mental—, the object of mental sensation is necessarily different from it in at least one respect: it is mental. By the same token, the possibility of mental sensation by one whose sense organs are damaged is rejected, since it is exclusively upon the arising of a successful sensory cognition of a visual, auditive, olfactive, gustative or tactile stimulus by well-functioning physical senses that attention can be given to the mental image of such external objects and give rise to mental sensation. The gist of Dharmakīrti's argument against his critics reads as follows:

> tasmād indriya-vijñānânantara-pratyayôdbhavam
> mano 'nyam eva gṛhṇāti viśayaṁ nândhadṛk tataḥ (PV II:243).
>
> Accordingly, mental sensation that arises from sensory cognition as its immediately preceding cause apprehends an object very different [from the object of sensory cognition]. Consequently, the blind person has no visual cognition [of objects].

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[5]It is important to note here that it is not attention as an entity that is turned to the sensory cognition. Rather, attention is a by-product of the sensory cognition that is successful and strong enough to produce a mental image of its stimulus. As we shall see below, attention is only one of two aspects of mental activity. It corresponds to the cognitive aspect; the other being the objective aspect.

According to Dharmakīrti, therefore, sensory cognition grasps the sense data directly, while mental sensation grasps them indirectly through a mental image; that is, by means of sensory cognition. This mental image, however, is directly apprehended by mental sensation. In fact, it is only at this stage of mental sensation that we can speak of knowledge, for sensory cognition itself does not always awaken consciousness. As a matter of fact, as soon as consciousness, or attention, is awakened, we no longer speak of sensory cognition, but rather of mental sensation. Consequently, it is sensory cognition that is the object of knowledge, and not the aggregated atoms which can only be inferred as a cause of sensory cognition but can never be known directly[6]. Furthermore, the presence of a sensory cognition is itself inferred in the following manner: since I now have an experience of colour, I must have had a sensory cognition of that colour a moment before, which must have itself been caused by the presence of an aggregate of atoms of that colour in my ken. Our most primitive form of knowledge is therefore mental sensation, whose particular object of attention is the preceeding sensory cognition.

It must be emphasized, however, that the object of mental sensation is not a continuum of sensory cognitions, but rather a single sensory cognition. That is, one mental sensation does not take a series of sensory cognitions as its object. Instead, a mental sensation arises after each moment of sensory cognition. That this is the case is evidenced at a certain stage in the practice of *vipaśyanā* meditation, especially the mindfulness of the body, when attention is so sharp that one notices the evanescent nature of matter (and sensation) as well as that of the mind that cognizes it. We will

[6]Hence the claim that Dharmakīrti was a phenomenalist. Had he been a realist, his theory would make it possible for us to have conscious knowledge of the aggregations of atoms themselves. Had he been an idealist, the object of mental sensation would not be derived from external aggregations of atoms, but would rather be pure mental creations.

discuss this meditation technique in more detail in the next chapter.

2.2.2 Twofold nature of mental sensation

The most important point to be made about mental sensation, however, is not that its object is a sensory cognition. Rather, it is the fact that every moment of awareness possesses two aspects, one objective the other cognitive, and that these two aspects are revealed by the power of the mental event itself, not by a subsequent moment of awareness. In that sense, we can compare awareness to the activity of a lamp, for just as a lamp reveals the objects in its surrounding as well as its capacity to radiate light without requiring the presence of a second lamp, every awareness reveals its content and its cognitive nature by its own power[7]. In other words, for every cognition A there are two aspects a_1 and a_2 such that a_1 is the form, object or content of the cognition (that is, sensory cognition) and a_2 is the cognitive element or attention that cognizes a_1. The presence of the cognitive element a_2 is explained by the fact that every mental event is self-luminous. Thus a_1 being self-luminous, we have the impression that a cognitive element a_2 cognizes an objective element a_1. But this cognitive impression being itself a mental event, it is also self-liminous so that we have the impression not only that a_2 knows a_1, but also that a_2 knows itself as a cognizer of a_1. For example, in the cognition of blue, not only does one know "blue", but one also knows that there is a cognition of "blue". As Bimal Krishna Matilal explained, the only way for these two knowledges to be different is if one cognition has both an objective and a

[7]Note that awareness is analogous, not identical to the activity of a lamp. For indeed, while it is an observer who sees the objects revealed by the lamp as well as the lamp itself, there is no such observer in the case of mental phenomena which are aware of themselves. The difference is that the lamp reveals itself to the observer, while a mental event reveals itself to itself. Were the Buddhists to admit the existence of a soul which apprehends the presence of cognitive events, the example of the lamp would be much closer to mental activity than it is meant here.

cognitive aspect.

> In my awareness of blue I can distinguish between its two aspects, the blue-aspect and the cognition-aspect, of which the latter grasps the former. If the same event has also self-awareness, then this self-awareness aspect is to be distinguished from the cognition-aspect in that the self-awareness aspect picks out the cognition-aspect as distinguished by the blue-aspect while the cognition-aspect picks out the blue-aspect only. Now, if instead of the dual aspect, my awareness had only one aspect, either the blue-aspect or the cognition-aspect, then the awareness of the awareness, the self-awareness, would be indistinguishable from the awareness itself (Matilal 1986c, 76).

We must therefore speak of mental activity as having an "object-cognizing" aspect by which we mean that attention is given to mental objects, as well as a "self-cognizing" aspect which refers to the awareness of the cognition of the mental object (the cognition of the cognitive aspect of the mental phenomenon). Dignāga put it as follows:

> dvy-ābhāsaṁ hi jñānam utpadyate, svâbhāsaṁ viṣayâbhāsaṁ ca. tasyôbhayâbhāsasya yat sva-saṁvedanaṁ [text: saṁvedanam] tat phalam (PVS I:9a).
>
> Every cognition is produced with a twofold appearance, namely, that of itself [as subject] (*svâbhāsa*) and that of the object (*viṣayâbhāsa*). The cognizing of itself as [possessing] these two appearances or the self-cognition (*svasaṁvitti*) is the result [of the cognitive act] (Hattori 1968, 28).

It is by means of this twofold character of cognition that Dharmakīrti accounts for the direct knowledge of our various emotions which, at least at the initial moment of their occurences, are just as vivid—and thus non-conceptual, since vividness and conceptuality are mutually exclusive—as the visual cognition of the colour blue, for example. Indeed, since in addition to being directly accessible, the emotional reaction that is associated with a given mental image is never mistaken inasmuch as joy is obviously manifested as joy and pain as pain, the cognition of emotions had to be included as a case of sensation. Yet, because sensory cognition does not operate beyond the initial stage of the cognitive process where the senses come in contact with

the external world, it would have been inappropriate to assign the direct cognition of emotions to sensory cognition (Nagatomi 1979, 258). Accordingly, it is at the level of mental sensation that the cognition of emotions had to be explained. And Dharmakīrti argued that emotion is the form in which the cognitive aspect of awareness manifests itself when it apprehends its object. It is therefore the self-cognizing element of mental sensation that can account for the awareness of the whole range of emotions. Dharmakīrti writes:

> tasmāt sukhâdayo 'rthānāṁ svasaṁkrāntâvabhāsinām
> vedakaḥ svâtmanaś caiṣam arthebhyo janma kevala (PV II:266).
> arthâtmā svâtma-bhūto hi teṣāṁ tair anubhūyate
> tenârthânubhava-khyātir ālambas tu tadābhātā (PV II:267).
>
> [266] Accordingly, pleasure and so forth are conscious (1) of themselves as well as (2) of the objects that (cognitively) manifest (their own images) transposed onto them: they (viz. pleasure and so forth) originate only from their own objects. [267] The very object of these (sensations such as pleasure and so forth) is none other than (an aspect of) themselves: (hence) the former is directly experienced by the latter. It is to this effect that (conventional) mention is made of the 'direct experience of the object (by sensation)' (only in a figurative sense). But (ultimately) the object (*ālambana*) means (the cognition's) manifestation in that (form) (Nagatomi 1979, 257–8).

In addition to clarify how we cognize emotions, these two verses also serve to support the argument that Dharmakīrti never really intended (at least in PV) to draw a radical distinction between the two aspects of mental sensation as representing two kinds of sensation. Where such a distinction is made—and Dharmakīrti makes it himself in a later work—, mental sensation is limited to the awareness of the object-aspect (i.e. of sensory cognition), while the cognition of the cognition-aspect is associated with self-awareness and stands by itself as a type of sensation. It is at NB I:6–10 that Dharmakīrti takes this position where he says that there are four categories of sensation and goes on to discuss sensory cognition, mental sensation, self-awareness and yogic intuition as if mental sensation and self-awareness were unre-

lated. In PV, however, there is no explicit statement to that effect and verses 266–7, above, are even hinting at the contrary position that there is a definite connection between object-cognition and self-awareness since one cannot go without the other. It could be argued, therefore, that Dharmakīrti originally intended simply to elucidate the object-cognizing and cognition- or self-cognizing aspects of mental sensation, and that his separate discussions in NB of the object-cognizing aspect of mental sensation *qua* mental sensation without any explicit attempt to connect it with self-awareness may be due to his belief that the relation between the two was too obvious to justify the addition of another verse to his already cryptic treatise (Nagatomi 1979, 258). His confidence in the wit of future students to catch the obvious in Dignāga's and his own works, or his misunderstanding of Dignāga's verse altogether—a verse that clearly establishes a relation between the two aspects (cf page 41)—, certainly contributed to the confusion.

Another reason why I believe that Dharmakīrti argued that the awareness of the mental object and the awareness of the cognitive act are part of every act of attention as opposed to being two types of mental activities dissociated one from the other is the fact that he subscribed to phenomenalism. In fact, when we consider that for him the object-cognizing aspect is nothing else than the awareness taking the appearance of an object, while self-awareness is simply the awareness taking the appearance or role of a cognizing agent apprehending the object, we get the impression that these two aspects are only an imposition of conceptual categories on a single moment of awareness. In other words, if these are only appearances, they are only provisionally true, and a genuine moment of mental sensation is limited to awareness before the slightest distinction be drawn between the object of attention and the cognition that serves as an agent apprehending it. Thus it could very well be that Dharmakīrti

separately discussed the objective and cognitive/agentive aspects of mental sensation only in order to show that the dichotomy object–cognitive agent springs from a single source and that there is ultimately no justification for our habit of positing a cognizing agent as separate from the object of cognition. That is not to say that it is wrong to have the impression that every mental event has an objective and a cognitive/agentive appearance, and in fact one of the intentions of Dharmakīrti may also have been to show that these two aspects are very much real since every cognition is inevitably a cognition of a content. Yet, even if he admitted their ultimate existence, it is likely that he had a higher purpose in mind: that of showing that it is wrong to break them apart and hypostatize, on that basis, the reality of a separate field of fleeting objects to be cognized by an isolated and unchanging agent or self, the pursuit of which has become the object of many a religious practice.

Arguing in this way that Dharmakīrti's analysis of mental sensation was aimed at disproving the reality of an enduring self may be putting words in his mouth. Nevertheless, it is clear that his theory can be used for that purpose if only because it does not contradict the theory of non-self. It is clear that his theory accomplished much more than explaining human psychology since, if we take the object-cognizing and self-cognizing aspects of mental sensation to arise out of a single act of attention, as is suggested by his claim that the instrument, object and result of knowledge are the same, it can also be used to resolve the dichotomy self–other that is at the basis of the belief in an enduring self which, according to Buddhist doctrine, is the root of all suffering. Why we have the impression that there is an unchanging agent observing all of our cognitions is due, according to Dharmakīrti's theory, to the fact that every act of attention is self-luminous and reveals a cognitive aspect that apprehends an objective aspect. Simply, what is other is the hypostatization of the objective aspect of mental

events, while the self is none other than the hypostatization of their cognitive/agentive aspect. In other words, every cognition having two self-luminous elements, one that takes the appearance of an object and another that takes the appearance of a cognitive agent, focusing on the object-appearance leads to the impression that a cognitive agent cognizes a separate object, while focusing on that cognitive agent gives the impression that something else is cognizing the cognition of an object. It is that "something else", the fact that every cognition is self-luminous, that misleads us into believing in the existence of a permanent observer, an enduring self. For while the content of our cognitions changes at all moments, the cognitive element of every act of attention is ever present in the form of an agent. That is, while the objective aspect of mental events manifests itself in different forms, the cognitive aspect always manifests itself in the form of a cognizer—though with different emotions. Were it not for the fact that there is ultimately no difference between the arising of the mental object and the arising of the cognitive agent, there would be ground on which to argue for the existence of an unchanging self separate from mental phenomena. However, according to Dharmakīrti's theory, both object and subject spring from the same source, a mental event, and are therefore non-different. And since that event is impermanent, the cognitive aspect is only a disguised self.

Dharmakīrti's analysis of mental sensation as a valid means of knowing having a twofold appearance thus represents an alternative method for the defense of the non-self theory of the Buddhists. This method may have more to do with dogmatism than epistemology, however, especially when we consider that even one of his successors, Dharmottara, admitted that the object-cognizing aspect of mental sensation could not be legitimately proven and that it was instead a case of dogmatism on the part of his predecessors (Stcherbatsky 1930, 28). Then again, one should not readily blame

Dharmakīrti, when the fault may lie in Dharmottara's intellectual limitations or in the fact that he may have suscribed to idealism more than to phenomenalism.

2.2.3 On knowing knowledge

As mentioned above, self-awareness turned out to be a useful tool in the hands of the Buddhists in their ontological debate with the followers of Brahmanic traditions over the existence of an eternal soul. In terms of epistemology, however, self-awareness was an answer to the question of how we can be aware of knowledge. For unless we become aware of our cognition of blue, for example, that cognition is completely useless and can hardly be regarded as an instance of knowledge. Hence the question: how do we know knowledge? Three alternative answers were advanced by Indian philosophers: (1) When an awareness arises, it apprehends not only its object, but it apprehends itself as well; (2) it apprehends only its object and another awareness is necessary to apprehend it in retrospect; (3) not only is a subsequent awareness required, but it grasps the first moment of awareness only indirectly through inference. Another aspect of this problem is whether every cognition is necessarily cognized, or whether some may arise and fade away without being noticed at all. Dharmakīrti, as we saw above, held the view that knowledge is self-luminous and that no cognition is left uncognized. The Advaitins, Jains and Prābhākara Mīmāṁsakas subscribed to the same interpretation, although their motivations and arguments were different from Dharmakīrti's. The Nyāya, Sāṁkhya-yoga and Bhaṭṭa Mīmāṁsa schools replied that knowledge is known by a secondary cognition and not by itself, since the nature of knowledge is to illuminate its object, not itself[8].

[8]For a short and illuminating presentation of the position of various Indian schools of philosophy with regard to the question of how we know knowledge, see Maitra 1974, 162–5.

Dignāga's main argument in favor of self-awareness was connected with an attempt to explain recollection, namely the fact that recollection is not only of the object previously cognized, but also of the cognition itself. This line of reasoning was in fact mainly used to proclaim the objective and cognitive aspects of every mental event as discussed above. Nevertheless, it also served to advance the theory of self-awareness since, according to Dignāga, in the case that a cognition is cognized by a separate cognitive event we cannot avoid the consequence of an infinite regress for that separate cognition will need to have itself cognized and so on and so forth to the point that one would never be aware of the present cognition of "blue", for example, since the remaining of one's life would have to be spent to cognize the cognition that cognized the cognition ... that cognized the cognition of the object. But if every cognition is self-evidenced, or self-aware, the problem is solved, argued Dignāga. In fact, to really avoid infinite regress, it was argued that the cognition knows itself before it knows the object. For this reason, the form of knowledge belongs not to the object, but to the cognition itself (Rani 168), as the whole theory of mental sensation intends to show. The Naiyāyikas were quick to reply, however, that the nature of cognition is not self-awareness but cognition of other (the object), and that the memory of a cognitive event does not entail that the cognition be self-cognized, but simply that it be cognized. Moreover, the recollection of having had a given experience of blue, in addition to the recollection of the blue colour itself, may well be the result of an inference that the experience of blue must have taken place since the fact, blue, is remembered. And so we may dispense with self-awareness. Finally, since not every cognition need be cognized and since one further cognition is sufficient to know the cognition of "blue"—that second cognition not requiring confirmation—it is wrong to accuse us, say the Naiyāyikas, of holding a view leading to infinite regress.

When Dharmakīrti entered into the debate, he therefore had to take an approach totally different from Dignāga's. His argument for self-awareness is tied to the idea that there is ultimately no distinction between the apprehensible object and the apprehending cognition—a theme that comes back again and again whenever he has to face the music—, and that the only way to account for their apparent distinction is to admit that cognition is self-luminous by nature. His argument at PVin 55 is summarized by Matilal (1986c, 77) as follows:

> The non-difference of the apprehensible object and the apprehending subject (the cognition itself) is established by the *hetu*, i.e. the evidence that these two are always, invariably and necessarily apprehended together. Hence their difference is only a convenient myth, a matter of convention only. The self-awareness of a cognition is established because even the perception of an object cannot be established otherwise for him who does not have the perception of that perception.

But the Naiyāyikas did not agree that the object and its experience are always cognized together. Certainly, an object must be experienced prior to its being remembered, but it is not necessary that this experience be itself cognized prior to the memory (NBh 136ff). In reply to Dharmakīrti, the Naiyāyikas thus used the same argument as they had used against Dignāga—that all cognitions need not be cognized—so that the debate did not make any progress because of their dogmatism. Dharmakīrti's commentators, however, took their share of dogmatism since we can hardly call their arguments in defense of self-awareness arguments. For example, Prajñākaragupta contented himself with saying that while some entities need two illuminators to have themselves cognized (e.g. a pot needs light and the visual organ), and others need only one (e.g. a lamp needs the visual organ only), cognitions need no illuminators other than themselves (Matilal 1986c, 79). Śāntarakṣita did no better since his argument is limited to saying that a cognition does not depend on anything other than

itself to make itself known (TS 2012). How we know knowledge is therefore an issue over which we cannot declare a winner among Indian philosophers. All that we can conclude is that Dharmakīrti and his followers held that cognitions, whether conceptual or not, are self-luminous inasmuch as they do not require another moment of awareness in order to have themselves cognized. In other words, every awareness is self-evident inasmuch as there is direct and unquestionable knowledge of the object of mental activity and of the presence or occurence of the mental event all at once. For example, although it may be questioned whether it is really a man that I see in the dark, there is no doubt that I see something and that there is an act of seeing on my part, and I do not need someone else or a subsequent cognition to bring me to this evidence. Every cognition or moment of awareness therefore reveals by its own power both its content and the fact of its being a cognitive event.

2.2.4 Perceptual judgement: result of mental sensation

The final question to be addressed with regard to mental sensation concerns its result. As Katsura (1984, 226) has argued, Dharmakīrti recognized at least three types of conceptual knowledge among which only inference and verbal communication (by means of which we can infer the intention of the speaker) were accepted as valid means of knowing. But while it is not given the status of a valid means of knowing, the third type of conceptual knowledge is perhaps the most important of the three for it is how Dharmakīrti was able to fill the gap between the two radically distinct forms of knowledge (sensation and inference) and explain the progression from the non-conceptual to the conceptual. Stcherbatsky (1932, 211) called this important step "perceptual judgement"; it is the judgement that immediately follows a successful mental sensation. And it is not until that judgement arises, in the third moment

of sensation after sensory cognition and mental sensation, that the process of direct knowledge is completed.

This judgement, according to PS I:3d, is "the association of name (*nāman*), genus (*jāti*), etc. [with a thing perceived, which results in verbal designation of the thing]" (Hattori 1968, 25). Dharmakīrti later enlarged this definition to englobe even unverbalized concepts when he wrote at NB I:5: "a judgement is a cognition the representation of which is capable of association with verbal designation"[9]. A perceptual judgement is therefore a conceptual process which eventually results in assigning a predicate to the object of attention in the form "This is such and such"; a predicate which will in all circumstances belong to either one of the following five linguistic classes: (1) proper names, such as "Devadatta"; (2) genus, such as "cowhood"; (3) quality, such as "white"; (4) action, such as "to cook"; and (5) substance, such as "staff-bearer" (Hattori 1968, 25). This predication arises as a result of the intellect's attentiveness to the mental image; that is to say, as a result of mental sensation which is sufficient to start the mechanism of concept-formation that culminates in the application of names and the drawing of inferences (Stcherbatsky 1932, 205). It must be noted, however, that as the successful result of sensation, the perceptual judgement is not itself a sensation because it makes use of concepts of which all sensations are free. Neither is it a source of knowledge since unlike inference it grasps what has already been grasped (PV I:5ab) by mental sensation. But while having no real epistemological value, its role in the cognitive process is not negligible since it is only after the perceptual judgement has arisen that purposeful action toward the stimulus can be undertaken. In fact, it is depending on their capacity to fulfill purposes that

[9]NB I:5: *abhilāpa-saṁsarga-yogya-pratibhāsā pratītiḥ kalpanā.*

we will distinguish between deceitful, erroneous judgements on the one hand, and reliable judgements on the other. That is to say, a judgement is reliable if it leads to successful action or to valid inference. The reliable judgement is what we call perceptual judgement, which is a conventional piece of knowledge insofar as it consists in imposing universal characteristics on a series of particulars (PV I:7d–8a), and also so far as it leads to the fulfilment of desires, the presence of which is a sign of delusion according to Buddhist doctrine.

How does this secondary apprehension of particulars occur? First, according to Dharmakīrti perceptual judgements and concepts in general do not and cannot have any connection whatsoever with the object of sensory cognition. But not only do they not refer to the fleeting aggregation of atoms, they also do not refer to the object of mental sensation, or at least not directly. Were it directly connected with the object of sensation, a concept or word would mean whatever object with which it was first associated and could not refer to similar objects experienced at a later time (PV III:92). Also, one could not speak of the objects of the past or future since the words and concepts would have no meaning in the absence of their referents at the time they are used (PV II:34 and 39). Finally, in case a genuine connection between words and objects existed, one would experience objects being spoken about as vividly as if they were present (PVSV 207.3–5). Let us consider in more detail this latter argument which, at PV II:127cd–32, follows from the theory that a relation, to be valid, must meet at least two criteria: association and dissociation. Briefly, a relation of causality of the type "*A* causes *B*", for example, is justified only if *B* is present whenever *A* is present (association), and if *B* is absent whenever *A* is absent (dissociation). But as Dharmakīrti shows, these criteria are not met in the case of the relation between universal properties—which are linguistic in nature—and particulars, for otherwise a

vivid appearance of an object would result from the simple uttering of its name. It is well known, however, that one does not become warm merely upon saying the word "fire", and we can infer from the non-observation of the effect of fire (i.e. heat) that the cause, fire itself, is not present. Furthermore, from the absence of a particular fire we infer the absence of all of its effects. But since the word and concept "fire" is present, it cannot be the effect of the particular fire which is absent. Similarly, if there were a causal relation between particulars and judgements, so that concepts and words would refer to particulars and would in fact inhere in particulars, it would be impossible to ever sense something without naming it, even if we had never seen or heard of the object before. Moreover, in case such a relation existed, it would follow that even a blind man, for example, would see an object upon hearing its name. But the fact that we often do not know the name or function of an object, and that blindness exists among those who can hear words show that an invariable relation between words and objects is not real. Dharmakīrti writes:

> na viśeṣeṣu śabdānāṁ pravṛttāv asti sambhavaḥ (PV II:127cd).
> an-anvayāt viśeṣāṇāṁ saṅketasyâpravṛttitaḥ
> viṣayo yaś ca śabdānāṁ saṁyojyeta sa eva taiḥ (PV II:128).
> asyedam iti sambandhe yāv arthau pratibhāsinau
> tayor eva hi sambandho na tadendriya-gocaraḥ (PV II:129).
> viśada-pratibhāsasya tadârthasya avibhāvanāt
> vijñānâbhāsa-bhedo hi padārthānāṁ viśeṣakaḥ (PV II:130).
> cakṣuṣā 'rthâvabhāse 'pi yaṁ paro 'syeti śaṁsati
> saḥ eva yojyate śabdaiḥ na khalu indriya-gocaraḥ (PV II:131).
> a-vyāpṛtendriyasyânya-vāṅ-mātreṇâvibhāvanāt
> na cân-udita-sambandhaḥ svayaṁ jñāna-prasaṅgataḥ (PV II:132).

> [127cd] It is not possible to use words with respect to particulars. [128] Conventions are useless because they have no association to particulars, and [because of this] only the subject matter of words can be connected to words. [129] Indeed, when [we establish] the relation "this is [the name] of this [object]", the relation is only between those two imagined things and consequently is not within the scope of the senses [130] since at that time [of naming] there is no perception of an object having a clear appearance. So because the distinguishing mark of things is the different form [they produce] in consciousness, [the object of sen-

> sory and verbal cognition are not the same]. [131] Even when there is perception of an object by the eye, only that which another person says [belongs] to it is connected with words. It is certainly not the object of the senses [132] since one whose senses are not functioning does not perceive [a particular] merely through the words of another [person]. And it is not the case that [the word that conveys information] does not have its relation [between the expression and the expressed object] produced, for [otherwise] the consequence [would be that the object] is known by itself [just from hearing the word, independently of any conventions].

So because of the lack of association and dissociation between concepts and particulars, we must conclude as Dharmakīrti did at PV II:5–6 that universals and all the categories of words cannot be invariably connected to the particular and are nothing else but social conventions.

> sãsti sarvatra ced buddher nânvaya-vyatirekayoḥ
> sāmānya-lakṣaṇa 'dṛṣṭeḥ cakṣū-rūpâdi-buddhivat (PV II:5).
> etena samayâbhogâdy-antar-aṅgânurodhataḥ
> ghaṭôtkṣepaṇ sāmānya-saṁkhyâdiṣu dhiyo gatāḥ (PV II:6).
>
> [5] One might think that [the causal potential] exists everywhere, [but] it is not present in the universal because of the idea's lack of association and dissociation as [can be observed] in the cognition of such things as colour through the eye. [6] [Accordingly,] the cognitions associated with such things as pots, lifting, universals, numbers and so forth are arrived at because of the mind's conformity with conventions, surrounding and so forth.

So what do judgements refer to and how do they occur? As it is spelled out in Dharmakīrti's theory of language, concepts denote properties abstracted from the particular by disregarding differences and amplifying similarities. More specifically, a perceptual judgement arises first as a result of superimposing unity upon a series of distinct mental sensations by disregarding their evanescent nature and overemphasizing the fact that they have similar causes, i.e. by focusing on the fact that each sensory cognition of which mental sensation is aware arises as a result of a contact of the senses with similar aggregations of atoms moment after moment. In addition to making generalizations, the formation of concepts and the application of names

function on the principle of exclusion of the opposite (*anyâpoha*), that opposite being whatever has a different function from what is observed because it possesses a different set of causes (Katsura 1991, 143). So for example, the word or concept "cow" refers to what is not a non-cow. The identification and exclusion of opposite general qualities and functions being a conceptual activity, judgements therefore refer to nothing else but judgements (i.e. exclusion of others), and a word is simply the association of a sound with that particular judgement. And since concepts themselves make use of words, we find that concepts arise on the basis of linguistic conventions, and linguistic conventions are themselves based on concepts: the two are in a mutually supporting relation (Payne 269). But if concepts are based on words and words on concepts, how are we to explain the first association of a concept with a word and vice-versa? If we take the example of a youth learning a first language, we may think that a given concept is progressively formed on the basis of repeatedly hearing a word and associating it with an object of sensation. Alternatively, if we take the example of one learning a second language, a new word will be associated with a given concept by the same process of repeatedly hearing the new word at the appropriate time. But this, according to Dharmakīrti, does not explain the process adequately. He says instead that perceptual judgements have their origin in beginningless past impressions[10].

So because they designate only some aspects of the particular and because they vary according to the inclination (i.e. past impressions) of the perceiver (Katsura 1984, 226), perceptual judgements are indirect and partial forms of knowledge. For

[10]PVSV 208.1: *padârtha-anāśritya-utpadyamānā vikalpā sva-vāsanā-prakṛtim anuvidadhatī* (A judgement is arising without any connection to the object, [but] is [instead] conforming to our own past impressions as its root causes). Śāntarakṣita elaborated at TS 1216: *atīta-bhava-nāmârtha-bhāvanā-vāsanânvayāt. sadyojāto 'apy adyogād iti karttavya tāpaṭuḥ* (Through the continuance of the impression left by the constant associating of the thing and its name during past lives, —even the new-born infant becomes capable of activity, by reason of the said conceptual content (Jha 1937-9, 616)).

example, a lustful man may consider a woman as an object of his passion, a monk may regard her as a disgusting piece of decomposing matter, and a dog may see in her an occasion to fill its stomach (Katsura 1984, 226). Because judgements of this kind have absolutely nothing to do with the reality of the particular, but are instead the result of the perceiver's dispositions, perceptual judgements and judgements in general are considered to be distortions of reality.

In summary, a perceptual judgement is a mental construction associated with language which can never do better than conceal the ultimate nature of things. It appeals to universal concepts which, unlike the particular, are inefficient in themselves, are superimposed on a continuum of events, are common to many things, and are not apprehensible independently of verbal conventions. Nonetheless, perceptual judgement is the successful product of the entire process of sensation, which in its final stage consists in paying attention to the impression produced in the mind by the contact of the physical senses with the external world. Once the judgement arises, we are no longer in the realm of sensation, but rather make a first step in conceptual "reality", where inference is the foremost means of knowing[11].

2.3 Non-conceptuality of sensation

As we have seen in the above presentation of Dharmakīrti's theory of sensation, our author held the view that the ultimately real is what comes in contact with the physical senses before any kind of interpretation or processing be done by the intellect. Insofar as he believed that reality could be known through sensation, Dharmakīrti was

[11]Shoryu Katsura gives numerous accounts of the terminology that Dharmakīrti used in PV to refer to perceptual judgement and its workings in an article to appear in the memorial volume in honour of A. K. Warder.

in perfect accord with the philosophical tradition already in place, which also accorded the highest value to sensation as the most reliable and direct means of knowing reality. Yet, insofar as he thought we could only know our mental representations of this external reality, and not reality as such, he deviated from the established epistemological tradition except for Vasubandhu and Dignāga who, among others, already subscribed to phenomenalism. Also, and in this respect he was representative of the Buddhist tradition as a whole, Dharmakīrti strongly deviated from the naïve or direct realism of Brahmanic philosophers, in that he never believed that conceptual constructions, universals or language could denote the true character of reality. To him, all these were always distortions of reality—though they had some practical value—, while to most others concepts and verbal reports were innocent until proven guilty and corresponded to a level of reality superior to phenomenal experience. But was Dharmakīrti, and Dignāga before him, justified to say that concepts have no basis in reality and are merely mental constructions to which we should not attach any supreme value? Are non-judgemental cognitions really possible? What did he have to gain by holding on to such a sceptical attitute toward language? On the other hand, why were the Naiyāyikas, for example, so eager to prove, against Dharmakīrti, that universal properties do exist in the outside world and can be the object of sensation?

This debate between Buddhist and Brahmanic philosophers over the existence of universal properties and the nature of sensation may have had its origin in the work of Dignāga who, instead of criticizing heretical views within Buddhism like Vasubandhu had done in AK, directed his effort at criticizing the epistemological theories of non-Buddhist schools. With respect to the theory of sensation, he is reported to be the first Indian thinker to have introduced a radical distinction between judgemental and non-judgemental sensation, rejecting the first and accepting only the latter as a valid

source of knowledge (Shastri, 434). This distinction provoked the Brahmanic thinkers into a debate that lasted for centuries.

We can recall from NS 1.1.4 that the Naiyāyikas already recognized that one of the characteristics of sensory cognition was its inexpressibility [12]; a view that could lead one to believe that they accepted a form of non-judgemental cognition well before Dignāga, since they admitted that the first moment of sensation lacked association with words. However, they also held that universal properties were directly cognizable through sensation because they inhered in the particulars. Thus, for the Naiyāyikas, non-judgemental sensation applied to the simultaneous cognition of the particular, the universal and inherence, while judgemental sensation was the cognition in which the previously cognized universal property and its relation to the particular was verbalized. They further argued that both of these stages were equally valid instances of sensation for they considered an inexpressible cognition stripped of universal content, as sensation was conceived by the Buddhists, to be epistemologically uninteresting and useless because too primitive and outside the scope of our consciousness. In other words, to the Naiyāyikas reality had to make sense and unless it did, it was not reality at all; that is, they gave priority to the world of ideas over that of physical or mental phenomena. But as we have shown in the previous section on perceptual judgement, universal properties cannot have any genuine relation to the particulars, so that Buddhists had no choice but to reject the two types of sensation advanced by the Naiyāyikas. The heresy of the Naiyāyikas compelled Dignāga to say that sensation is by definition completely devoid of judgement[13].

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[12]NS 1.1.4: *indriyârtha-saṁnikarṣôtpannaṁ jñānam avyapadeśyam [...] pratyakṣam.* Quoted in Van Bijlert (1989, 7).

[13]PS I:3c: *pratyakṣaṁ kalpanâpoḍham.*

Dharmakīrti subscribed to the same position as Dignāga's. His argument is found at PV II:123-5, where he begins by saying that the non-judgemental character of sensation is evidenced by sensation itself, and then invites his reader to perform a little experiment which should prove the value of his position. As Stcherbatsky reported (1932, 151), the purpose of this experiment is to show that there is a limit to empirical cognition, and that this limit is the direct cognition of the extreme particular: a cognition which escapes the boundaries of thought and to which we have no conscious access.

> pratyakṣaṁ kalpanâpoḍhaṁ pratyakṣeṇaiva sidhyati
> pratyātma-vedyaḥ sarveṣāṁ vikalpo nāma-saṁśrayaḥ (PV II:123).
>
> Sensation is established as free from judgement by sensation itself. For all [sentient beings], the cognition associated with words is known [as such] by itself.

In his commentary to this verse, Manorathanandin glosses "*pratyakṣenaiva*" as "*svasaṁvedanenaiva*" (self-awareness)[14], which suggests that Dharmakīrti's argument rests on the observation that since upon recollection (or self-awareness) some cognitions show no sign of judgement whatsoever, those cognitions are non-judgemental, and they must correspond to sensation. Had there been any trace of judgements, they would have been evidenced by the cognition itself since everyone who makes judgements is also aware of making those judgements. That such cognitions exist is therefore attested by experiences similar to what is described in the following two verses.

> saṁhṛtya sarvataś cintāṁ stimitena antarâtmanā
> sthito 'pi cakṣuṣā rūpam īkṣate sâkṣa-jā matiḥ (PV II:124).
> punar vikalpayan kiñcid āsīn me kalpanedṛśī
> vetti ceti na pūrvôktâvasthāyām indriyāt gatau (PV II:125).

[14]PVV 60.8-9: *tac caitad īdṛśaṁ pratyakṣenaiva svasaṁvedanenaiva sidhyati.*

> [124] After withdrawing one's thoughts from everything, one who is calmly absorbed with his mind perceives colour through the eye[-consciousness]; this [non-judgemental] cognition is produced by the senses. [125] On the other hand, someone who is thinking knows "I had such a thought (judgement)", and this is not the case when a [cognition] is produced through the senses as in the aforementioned situation.

As Manorathanandin adds in his commentary to verse 125, and as was suggested by verse 123, if a judgement were part of sensory experience, its impression would be remembered[15]. But since what is remembered is precisely the fact of not having passed judgements, we have to conclude that there really was no judgement in that particular moment of cognition and accept that it is possible to have cognitions that are devoid of judgement. In the above example, this non-judgemental cognition is none other than mental sensation. This is evident by the implicit mention of attention, which is characteristic of mental sensation and always absent in sensory cognition.

Śāntarakṣita took an altogether different approach to prove that non-judgemental cognitions were possible. While Dharmakīrti's experiment consists in focusing one's attention on a patch of colour without allowing any thought to rise up to consciousness, Śāntarakṣita suggests that a non-judgemental cognition also occurs with respect to the sensory object to which we don't pay any attention while our mind is involved with something else. And because such non-judgemental cognition arises when the mind is occupied with some other thought, we know that it arises directly from the senses, which are not occupied with the thought in question. Also, since the judgement follows the sensory cognition, we know that it is secondary and does not belong to the reality grasped by the senses. His argument therefore goes to show that sensory cognition is possible and that all judgement is merely an imposition of concepts on

[15]PVV 60.17–8: *yadi sā tatra syāt, tat saṁskārasya smṛtir jāyeta, tasmān nāstīti niścīyate.*

the ultimately real particular which is directly grasped through the senses.

> pratyakṣaṁ kalpanâpoḍhaṁ vedyate 'ti parisphuṭam
> anyatrā-sakta-manasā 'py akṣair nīlâdi-vedanāt (TS 1242).
>
> Sensation is very vividly experienced as free from judgement because even one whose mind is totally absorbed with something else [still] experiences such things as the colour blue with [the] eyes.

With this and the preceeding verses, Buddhists have succeeded in showing that non-conceptual sensory and mental cognitions are possible. But we may ask whether they had any interests other than epistemological interests when they showed that conceptual cognition had a limit. Why, in fact, were Buddhist epistemologists so strongly opposed to the view that universal properties are real and insisted instead that they are mere mental constructions?

I suggest that in developing their theory on the formation of concepts Dharmakīrti and Dignāga also devised a means by which they could show that just as concepts are superimpositions on real particularities, so is the eternal soul advanced by most Indian schools a superimposed invention on a series of events. Indeed, Dharmakīrti's experiment, which shows that upon the cessation of imagination and thinking it is possible to cognize the unique particular directly and consequently acknowledge the fact that it is stripped of all the universal attributes which we wrongly impose on it through our various judgements, can apply just as well to the observation of the human body-mind continuum and culminate in the realization that only the five aggregates are real and that no eternal soul can be experienced over and above them. So once again, it would appear that Buddhists may have embarked in the epistemological adventure in order to prove the value of their doctrine of non-self by means of more systematic argumentation. And in so doing, they developed an elaborate system similar to that of their opponents—in the sense that they used the same terminology—

but different enough to prove their own ontology's superiority and disprove any view that deviated from theirs. In other words, the Buddhist epistemologists' claim that sensation is non-judgemental can be equated with that of their predecessors' that nothing has a soul.

2.4 Non-errancy of sensation

A second characteristic of sensation in Dharmakīrti's system is that of non-errancy. This is an innovation of Dharmakīrti that cannot be found in Dignāga's work. In fact, Dignāga insisted that saying that sensation is non-erroneous is redundant since by the very fact of being devoid of judgement, sensation is non-erroneous. In other words, for Dignāga error is the result of mental activity and judgement, and nothing else. The problem with this interpretation of error, however, is that it leaves unexplained erroneous cognitions due to malfunctioning senses, e.g. seeing two moons as a result of an eye-disease. As Dharmakīrti explains, it is not the case that the mind is responsible for such an illusion since the following conclusions would follow:

> (1) It [the illusion] would be removed even when the defect of sense-organ is not cured, as the erroneous mental cognition of a snake for what is really a rope is removed only by the close examination of the object. (2) It would not be removed even when the defect of the sense-organ is cured. (3) A man whose sense-organ is sound would also perceive a double moon if he were to hear about it from a man who had a defective sense-organ. (4) It would not be immediate to sense-organ but would be mediated by remembrance. (5) The image of a double moon would not be clear (Hattori 1965, 127; PV II:297–8).

But since the cognition of two moons is a vivid sensory cognition, it does not involve conceptualization. Yet, it is not a valid cognition since it is inconsistent with reality. Therefore, argues Dharmakīrti, we must admit that in addition to the errors due to concepts, there can also be non-judgemental errors (PV II:300) and that this

most unsuspected kind of error is due to defective sense-organs (PV II:288). Accordingly, it is not sufficient to say that sensation—more specifically sensory cognition—is devoid of judgement for it to be a valid means of knowledge; it must also be non-erroneous.

Christine Keyt (1980, 135–6) has argued that this introduction of non-errancy as a characteristic of sensation was necessary not only to correct Dignāga's position, but also to correct Dharmakīrti's weak definition of reliability; weak in the sense that reliability is defined in purely pragmatic terms, i.e. in terms of the object reached being the same as the object intended, and not in terms of an accurate representation of the object. The notion of non-errancy of sensation, in other words, suggests that although he put a great deal of emphasis on the notion of efficiency, Dharmakīrti did not subscribe to a pragmatic theory of truth. Rather, he upheld a correspondence theory of truth insofar as only the sensation that correctly represents reality is a valid means of knowing.

The problem with the criterion of non-errancy, however, is that it undermines the validity of direct sensory experience as a means of refuting our conceptual errors. Indeed, it undermines the whole edifice of knowledge for there is now no means to establish correspondence between our cognitions and reality. If sensation were true in all cases, one could refute a mental error such as taking the whirling torch to be a circle of fire by reducing the velocity of the movement until one could clearly distinguish the single torch. This direct cognition of the torch would serve to show that the circle of fire was an illusion due to the incapacity of the mind to integrate the information provided by the senses. But if non-judgemental sensation is liable to error so that inference is necessary to test the validity of our most primitive cognitions, it is never certain when a direct experience can validate or invalidate a judgement since

we now have a circular system in which sensation validates inference and inference validates sensation. This is exactly the kind of dilemma that Nāgārjuna raised in his *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. Dharmakīrti's criterion of non-errancy therefore plays the double function of assuring that knowledge be a correspondence between our sensations and reality, and of rendering impossible to know when this correspondence prevails. In fact the consequence of the criterion of non-errancy is that the only type of correspondence that can hold will be between our ideas and our mental impressions. That is to say, error is no longer the result of a conflict between sensory cognitions and their supporting reality, but rather the result of a conflict between conceptual understanding and phenomenal experience.

2.5 Summary: making sense of sensation

We have seen in this chapter that for Dharmakīrti ordinary sensation, or direct and unconceptualized knowledge, proceeds in three stages. First there is sensory cognition by which we acquire information about the external world. Immediately following this physical sensation comes mental sensation where the mind is attentive to the fact that something or other stimulated the physical senses. Finally comes a judgement which attempts to capture some of the features of the object of cognition by a process of generalization and exclusion of opposites. On the whole, Dharmakīrti's account of this cognitive process appeals as very sensible. Yet we have to ask to what extent sensation, both physical and mental, is really a form of knowledge. For intuitively, we mean by knowledge a conscious apprehension of the nature and reliability of an object for the pursuit of human purposes, and this is a condition which neither sensory cognition nor mental sensation seem able to fulfill because they are devoid of judgement.

As we saw in section 2.3, the fault here is not with Dharmakīrti's definition of sensation for his and Śāntarakṣita's experiments clearly show that sensory cognition and mental sensation are indeed non-judgemental. We find that sensory cognition is essentially an unconscious act in which we are never aware of the object of cognition and hence cannot know its true nature. In other words, sensory cognition does not even know its own object! Certainly, it is an important element of the cognitive process; nevertheless it has very limited value by itself. Its only value lies in the fact that it is instrumental in the formation of a mental image of the external world, which image subsequently gives rise to knowledge. As such, sensory cognition is therefore a *pramāṇa* only in the sense of a means of knowledge but never as an instance of knowledge.

And the situation is much the same with regard to mental sensation. For although it is a conscious activity insofar as it involves attention, mental sensation is also devoid of judgement since it knows its object both directly and vividly. And insofar as it is devoid of judgement, we may wonder whether it has any value beyond the fact that it brings new data for the conceptual faculty to chew on. It would seem that until a perceptual judgement arises, mental sensation is just as meaningless as sensory cognition since it does nothing more than revealing the presence of a given phenomenon in the stream of consciousness without being able to identify what it is. Certainly, the situation is a little more complicated when judgements become the object of mental sensation since this particular moment of self-awareness of judgements allows us to know knowledge. For example, in the case of the judgement "This is a book" the fact that this mental event is self-luminous reveals two aspects to the cognizer: (1) the cognition of the object by means of the word "book", and the cognition of the judgement "this is a book". But while we know that we have passed the judgement "This

is a book", this in itself does not render the judgement valid; it does not guarantee that the judgement itself is knowledge. The confirmation of the judgement as a piece of knowledge is done in the subsequent moments by means of testing and reasoning. So even in the self-cognizing aspect of mental cognition all that is known is that one is aware of something, without really knowing whether that of which one is aware is true. Mental sensation is therefore never an instance of knowledge at all. Yet, because it is essential to the formation of judgement, it is an important means of arriving at knowledge, which is always conceptual.

Sensory cognition and mental sensation are therefore valuable to knowledge in that they provide the cognizer with the data upon which knowledge can be built. In that sense, it is the criterion of novelty set forth in chapter one (cf page 20) that is most important at this early stage of cognition, not that of being a reliable guide for goal-oriented actions.

One implication of the dominance of the criterion of novelty in sensation is that direct experience only provides the data for the confirmation of truth-claims, but does not itself confirm the truth-claims. This confirmation is done in the subsequent moments when the facts of sensation are gathered and a final judgement in made according to the laws of logic. Accordingly, truth is not what is experienced, but the error-free interpretation of experience. The fact that Dharmakīrti recognized that even direct experience could be erroneous (cf section 2.4) reinforces the importance of such conceptual activity in the search for truth. One implication of the possible unreliability of direct experience and of the central role of reasoning in the search of knowledge is that in the matter of religion a given religious experience is not in itself a source of truth. Rather, it is only the interpretation of the experience that can be considered as true. And if no sensible interpretation of the experience is possible, one

will have to conclude that what first appeared to be a blissful experience of reality was in fact a mere illusion. Hence the value of epistemology on any religious path.

We must conclude, therefore, that Dharmakīrti's theory of sensory cognition and mental sensation only serves to explain how we become acquainted with the obvious data of experience, and does not at all contribute to the discovery of truth. Hence the Naiyāyikas, for whom only the concept-loaded perception can be considered a knowledge, may have been justified to reject the Buddhist theory of sensation as too inchoate and illusive to be real. Yet, we must remember that Dharmakīrti's theory of sensation is an epistemological, not a metaphysical enterprise. And as an epistemological investigation, it is a very decent accomplishment.

Chapter 3

Dharmakīrti on yogic intuition

As Karl Potter (1963) has argued, the possibility of achieving complete freedom was a matter central to the development of the philosophical and religious traditions of India. It also had a bearing on Dharmakīrti's thought, and in the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter of his *Pramāṇavārttika* Dharmakīrti proved himself a fervent believer in the possibility of freedom when he attempted to show that those who follow and understand the teachings of the Buddha are best equipped to achieve this goal[1]. Assuming for the sake of simplicity that complete freedom is attainable, we will, in this chapter, focus our attention on the epistemological character of the experience that brings it about, namely, the yogic intuition that crowns the practice of meditation. But before embarking on this investigation, it must be noted that while Dharmakīrti may have accepted the possibility of various yogic feats such as walking on water or reading other people's mind, his discussion of yogic intuition in PV is concerned strictly with the special cognition that enables the attainment of *nirvāṇa*. Accordingly, this is the only type of yogic experience with which we are concerned in this thesis.

It is in the chapter on sensation of PV that Dharmakīrti discusses most explicitly

[1]In the context of Buddhism, the goal, *nirvāṇa*, is essentially freedom from self-inflicted restrictions, discontent and rebirth.

the nature of yogic intuition, which he describes as a category of sensation because it is a vivid cognition pertaining to a real object. But unlike the objects of sensory cognition and mental sensation discussed before, the object of yogic intuition is real not because it is capable of causing cognition, but because it is efficient in the fulfilment of the highest human purpose: the attainment of complete freedom. This object is for Dharmakīrti none other than the four noble truths concerning the nature of discontent, its cause, its cessation and the way to its cessation reported to have been found and taught by the Buddha. As I hope to show in the following pages, while a thorough knowledge of the four noble truths may be the key to liberation, Dharmakīrti's arguments for including such intuition under the rubric of sensation are not compelling, and in fact appear to contradict two of the criteria that he had previously set forth to define sensation: (1) that the object of cognition be a particular and (2) that the cognition be devoid of concept. Having considered whether yogic intuition qualifies as a category of sensation, I then look at the problem of how to distinguish valid meditative experiences from hallucinations.

3.1 What is yogic intuition?

Dharmakīrti emphasized that it is only upon fully understanding the four noble truths that the Buddha—and anyone after him—could gain liberation. Specifically, this position proposes that freedom is the result of knowledge and that the first thing to realize in its pursuit is that life is fundamentally marked by discontent, which manifests itself in various ways, the most obvious of which is the physical and mental pains associated with birth, sickness, old age, death, sorrow, grief, despair, separation from the loved ones, etc. One is to realize, also, that even pleasureable experiences

are sources of discontent since the ephemeral character of pleasures renders impossible the permanent satisfaction of any desire. And most of all, one is to become fully aware of the fact that discontent arises as a result of the mere presence of the five aggregates of personality (body, consciousness, feeling, apperception and volition) which, though impermanent, are a source of attachment and hence of discontent since as sets of conditioned properties they form an object of attachment that can never be fully immune from unpleasant experiences. Any successful journey toward complete freedom therefore begins with the realization that all aspects of life are a source of discontent. Having understood the intricacies of discontent, one must next develop the desire and determination to remedy to the situation.

In this search for a cure against discontent, a crucial factor is the realization that though recurrent, discontent is in fact impermanent since it is seen occasionally, and it must therefore have a cause the presence or absence of which is responsible for the irregularity of its occurence (PV I:182). This cause, according to Dharmakīrti, is craving for existence (PV I:186); an attitude which springs from the false belief that continued existence and rebirth will eventually lead to the happiness of an enduring personality. If we push the investigation a little further, we find, therefore, that it is the belief in the existence of an enduring personality that is responsible for craving and the consequent discontent. Fortunately, once the cause of discontent has been identified, one is in a position to prevent its perpetuation, since by neutralizing the cause one is certain to eliminate the consequence. Accordingly, Dharmakīrti argues that discontent is preventable and that the realization of the truth of non-self, which is opposite to the cause of discontent, is the antidote needed for its eradication (PV I:138). We find, therefore, that the fundamental cause of discontent is ignorance; that is, the failure by the mental aggregate of apperception to recognize that all phenomena are in fact

marked by impermanence, pain and lack of self, and the wrongful interpretation of psycho-physical phenomena as enduring sources of pleasures belonging to the self. In this respect, Dharmakīrti's approach is in perfect accord with what is advanced in the twelvefold formulation of the principle of dependent origination which puts ignorance at the top of the chain of bondage[2]. As we just shown, however, this chain can be broken, and liberation comes about as a result of repeated and disciplined application of this new mode of thinking—that of lack of self—in every aspects of one's life until even the instinctive grasping at a self has stopped.

But this thorough understanding of non-self is a harduous process of learning, thinking and experimentation—reminiscent of the three levels of wisdom discussed in chapter one (see also AK IV:5ff). Firstly, Buddhist education begins with becoming acquainted with the four noble truths by listening to, or reading about traditional teachings and reflecting upon their meaning. Having begun to understand the doctrine, one then reflects carefully on what has been taught and tries to discern truth from falsity by appealing to the standards of textual exegesis and logical reasoning. Along with that process of learning and critical assessment of the validity of the teachings, one is to develop one's mental qualities in accordance with what one knows to be true in order to test whether there is more to the doctrine than mere theorizing. For it is only when one has applied the teachings to one's life that one will be in a position

[2]It is because the experience that leads to the cessation of discontent replaces ignorance by knowledge, that I have translated the expression "*yogi-pratyakṣa*" as "yogic intuition", thus making it clear that the experience is cognitive in nature, and is not simply the cessation of conscious activity as is suggested by the attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*). My translation also suggests that the cognition of yogins, if it is regarded as a type of sensation, is at the same time very different from the other types of sensation discussed in chapter two in that it reveals truths, not facts. Incidently, throughout Dharmakīrti's writings and the commentarial tradition that followed him, it is the word "*jñānam*" (cognition, knowledge) that generally appears in compound with the word "*yogin*" when this category of sensation is discussed, not the word "*pratyakṣam*". The use of the word "*jñānam*" supports my decision to coin the expression "yogic intuition" to this category of sensation.

to decide whether it is the means to one's goal or whether it should be abandoned. In other words, it is only after one has integrated the understanding of non-self into one's life that one will fully realize that no, there is no self, and yes, the absence of self-grasping is the way to freedom. Once such level of certainty has been attained and even the instinctive grasping at a self has stopped, one is able to prevent the formation of new defilements and is assured that those defilements which have not yet reached fruition will not, when they do reach fruition, create the conditions for further discontent. With this experiential knowledge, which goes beyond believing the words of a teacher and beyond intellectual knowledge, one has reversed the vicious cycle of craving and will, in due time, put a definite end to rebirth and discontent of all kinds and achieve complete freedom.

3.1.1 The practice of meditation

As already intimated in the above section, in order to arrive at yogic intuition, one is to undertake the practice of meditation and subject one's intellectual wisdom to the test of experience—which alone has the power to eliminate the instinctive sense of self and the propensities to defilements[3]. Since the liberative experience is, for Dharmakīrti, a cognitive experience, it is safe to say that the meditation technique which he must have endorsed as leading to the goal was most likely one similar to what is called *vipaśyanā* or insight meditation in classical meditation manuals. Briefly, *vipaśyanā* is an analytical form of meditation which consists in a mindful observation of every aspects of the body-mind continuum and the contextualization of the physical and mental events in terms of discontent, impermanence and lack of self. This technique

[3]NB I:11: *bhūtârtha-bhāvanā-prakarṣa-paryanta-jaṁ yogi-jñānaṁ ceti* (And the cognition of the yogin is produced on the termination of intense meditation on truth.).

is to be differentiated from that of *śamatha* or tranquillity meditation which, though helpful to the practice of *vipaśyanā* insofar as it strenghtens the concentration and calms the mind, is nevertheless radically different from it in that it consists specifically in withdrawing the mind from the activity of the senses until consciousness altogether ceases. Because the practice of tranquillity leads, in its higher stages, to various trances in which the analytical faculty is put to sleep, it is difficult to see how it could lead to the realization which Dharmakīrti had in mind when discussing yogic intuition. It is thus only through the practice of *vipaśyanā* that one will be able to test and establish the validity of the principles of the four noble truths unequivocally. In the words of Winston King (1980, 94), "To be aware of these actions [of body and mind] as an embodiement of that which comes to be and vanishes (impermanence), as that which is restless and ever unsatisfied (painfulness), and as the progression of a series of causes and effects (impersonality) *is the essence of vipassanā.*" And this awareness, according to Dharmakīrti, is what must be understood by yogic intuition.

A typical course of training in *vipaśyanā* will begin with the mindfulness of breathing which consists in observing the breath with vigilance as it comes in and as it goes out the nostrils without trying to control it in any way, observing long breaths as long and short breaths as short. As this exercise in mindfulness proceeds, the mind and body become calmer and calmer, and eventually it is the entirety of the bodily and mental phenomena that become the object of contemplation. At this stage, if we are to follow the account given in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* on meditation on the four noble truths, one is to contemplate the vanishing and painful nature of all psychophysical events until it becomes clear that they are indeed marked by impermanence and painfulness. This recognition of impermanence and painfulness will sooner or later lead to the realization that craving and self-grasping are the causes of one's

misery, and to the further realization, once the truth of non-self becomes apparent, that there is in fact no basis at all for self-grasping and that the abandonning of self-grasping is the way to the cessation of discontent. Put another way, once a certain level of concentration and clarity of mind has been reached, one begins to investigate whether the truths of impermanence, painfulness and non-self that one has studied and thought about before engaging in formal meditation practice apply to the data of experience. Once the cognition of the psycho-physical continuum as marked by discontent, impermanence and non-self is as vivid as the cognition of a grain of sand in the palm of one's hand, yogic intuition has occurred (NBTD 69.1–2).

3.2 Problem with yogic intuition

The problem with Dharmakīrti's account of yogic intuition is that he wants to incorporate it among the various types of sensation, while in fact the cognition pertains to a specific interpretation of psycho-physical phenomena and, as an interpretation, it seems inevitable that it will involve conceptual activity, which is said *ipso facto* to be absent from sensation. His position on the nature of the yogin's intuition is found at PV II:281 and subsequently defended in verses 282–6. These verses state that the yogin's cognition of the four noble truths, which results from the practice of meditation, is devoid of judgement because it is vivid. And since only sensations are devoid of judgement, yogic intuition must be a category of sensation. PV II:281 reads as follows:

> prāk uktaṃ yogināṃ jñānaṃ teṣāṃ tat bhāvanā-mayam
> vidhūta-kalpanā-jālaṃ spaṣṭam eva avabhāsate (PV II:281).
>
> The cognition of yogins has been discussed previously. Their cognition, which is the result of meditation and which is divested of the snares of judgement, appears quite vivid.

The information that Manorathanandin and Prajñākaragupta supply in their commentary to this verse is very important, for it is they who specify that the object of meditative practice is the four noble truths—which Dharmakīrti had discussed previously in PV I—and that the resulting cognition, yogic intuition, is a category of sensation. Prajñākaragupta writes:

> catur-ārya-sattya-viṣayaṁ yogināṁ jñānaṁ prāg uktaṁ. kuto hetos tat bhavatîty āha. bhāvanā-mayaṁ bhāvanā-hetukaṁ bhāvanā-balena ca spaṣṭâbhaṁ. spaṣṭâbhatvād evâvikalpakaṁ. tataḥ pratyakṣaṁ (PVBh 326.23–4).
>
> The cognition of yogins was previously said to have the four noble truths as its subject matter. What is the cause of that [cognition]? The cognition is the result of meditation, its cause is meditation and it appears vividly through the power of meditation. By the very fact of appearing vividly, it is devoid of judgement. So it is a sensation.

In the light of the commentaries, it becomes clear that Dharmakīrti's argument for including the yogin's cognition under the category of sensation rests on the notion of vividness and its incompatibility with judgements. It is therefore to Dharmakīrti's advantage to convincingly establish the mutual exclusion of judgements and the vividness of a cognition for his argument to hold. This is what he attempts to do in the remaining five verses of the section on yogic intuition.

The first objection to his position in verse 281, as reported by Prajñākaragupta (PVBh 326.25–7), is that while it is perfectly admissible to say that the cognition of an object which is present to the senses is devoid of judgement, it is not so obvious why one should accept the claim that the cognition of objects of the past or of the future, or the cognition of objects that are absent, become devoid of judgement merely through the power of meditation. The source of this objection becomes more evident when later in the commentary Prajñākaragupta explains that what must be understood by

cognitions whose subject matter is absent are judgements [4]. Why define judgements in this way? Because, as we saw in chapter two when discussing the nature of perceptual judgement (cf page 55), judgements and concepts have no connection with the object of sensory cognition and do not even have a direct connection with the mental image that follows from the direct sensory cognition of an external object. The proof is that the concept "table" can arise without there being a table present in the room. Accordingly, judgements refer to those objects that are not necessarily present to the five physical senses. In this light, leaving aside the interrogation about the possibility to cognize past or future objects, the objection which is of most interest for us becomes: how can a judgement become a non-judgement merely through the practice of meditation? For indeed, the application of the concepts of discontent, impermanence and non-self to the entirety of phenomenal existence as is stipulated in the four noble truths falls in the category of judgement. And it seems impossible that one could fully understand that these concepts are a faithful representation of reality without getting involved in conceptual thinking? To this objection, Dharmakīrti replies that there are situations in which people have vivid experiences of objects that are not present; namely, hallucinations and dreams, so there is no reason to doubt that the practice of meditation can produce vivid cognitions.

> kāma-śoka-bhaya-unmāda-caura-svapnâdy-upaplutāḥ
> abhūtân api paśyanti purataḥ avasthitān iva (PV II:282).
>
> Those who are mad with passion, sorrow or fear and those who are tormented by dreams of thieves and so forth see even absent objects as if [they were] standing firm before [them].

The point that Dharmakīrti is trying to make, therefore, is that through the inten-

[4] PVBh 327.3–4: *vikalpasya parokṣa-viṣayam eva rūpam iti pratipāditaṁ* (It is established that the nature of judgement is that its subject matter be absent).

sive practice of meditation, one can eventually produce a vivid mental representation of an object by sheer will power, just as those who are very confused can have vivid hallucinations. But while it shows that there can be vivid experiences of objects aside from the direct cognition of what is present to the senses, the verse does not provide a convincing argument as to why one should accept the fact that meditation can produce those vivid cognitions. Moreover, it does not explain why one should believe that those experiences, even if vivid, are devoid of judgement. Leaving the first problem aside for the moment, Dharmakīrti addresses the second in verse 283 where he claims that whatever cognition is connected with judgement cannot be vivid.

> na vikalpānubaddhasya asti sphuṭârthâvabhāsitā
> svapne api smaryate na ca tat tādṛś-arthavat (PV II:283).
>
> What is connected with judgement does not have the appearance of a vivid object. And what is remembered even in a dream has no such object.

As Manorathanandin reports in his commentary (PVV 121.9–11), the second half of this verse must be taken as a response to another objection which an opponent could build on the basis of Dharmakīrti's earlier reference to madness or confusion as an element capable of producing vivid experiences of absent objects. The argument is that if confusion can produce vivid hallucinations, certain dreams which are obviously the result of confusion should also contain vivid cognitions. Yet, since it is too often recollections that occur in dreams and since recollections are conceptual activities, the occurence of vivid dreams, the possibility of which was admitted in verse 282, is a counterexample to the claim of verse 283ab about the mutual exclusion of judgement and vividness. But as Manorathanandin writes, while dreams have a certain degree of vividness, it is nothing compared to the vividness of the experiences we have when awake. Accordingly, dreams do not really qualify as instances of vivid cognitions of

imaginary objects; hence Dharmakīrti's restatement in verse 283 above[5]. But contrary to what happens in the case of dreams, what is produced by meditation does have a vivid appearance and is devoid of judgement.

> aśubhā pṛthivī-kṛtsnâdi abhūtam api varṇyate
> spaṣṭâbhaṃ nirvikalpam ca bhāvanā-bala-nirmitam (PV II:284).
> tasmāt bhūtam abhūtaṃ vā yat yat eva ati bhāvyate
> bhāvanā-pariniṣpattau tat sphuṭâkalpa-dhī-phalam (PV II:285).
>
> [284] A meditation object of impure earth, even though it is not [physically] present [and] it has been constructed through the power of meditation, is described [by us] as having a vivid appearance and as being devoid of judgement. [285] Therefore, whatever is meditated upon very much, whether it is present or not, has a vivid and non-judgemental cognition as its consequence when one has perfected the practice of meditation.

Accordingly, to Dharmakīrti's mind yogic intuition is a category of sensation. And he wraps up his argument by saying:

> tatra pramāṇam saṃvādi yat prāk nirṇīta-vastuvat
> tat bhāvanā-jaṃ pratyakṣam iṣṭam śeṣāḥ upaplavāḥ (PV II:286).
>
> In that context, the sensation arising from meditation that is reliable, like [meditation on] an object previously established, is accepted as a means of knowing. The rest are impediments.

In order to evaluate Dharmakīrti's argument in these last three verses, it is neces-

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[5]PVV 121.9–11: *nanu viplava-vaśāt vikalpakam api svapne spaṣṭâbhaṁ jñānaṁ bhavati ity āha. svapne 'pi smārtaṁ smaraṇaṁ kiṇcid utpadyate. na ca tat prabodhâvasthāyāṁ tādṛg-arthavat yādṛśo nirvikalpenânubhūto 'rthas tādṛśârthena yuktaṁ smaryate. kiṁ tarhi aspaṣṭârtham eva svapna-smaraṇaṁ smaryate* ([Opponent] Is it not the case that because it is under the influence of confusion even the judgemental cognition occuring in a dream is vivid? [Reply] Some recollection occurs even in dream. And it is not the case that what is experienced by non-judgemental cognition in the waking state is like the object recollected in a dream. Rather, the recollection in a dream lacks vividness.). Prajñākaragupta presents a similar argument in PVBh 327.4–7: *svapne 'pi vikalpāḥ parokṣa-viṣayâkārāḥ samvedyante, na ca te spaṣṭâvabhāsinaḥ. viplava-balāt tu spaṣṭāyān na kiñcit svapnâdiṣv aspaṣtaṁ bhavet. dṛśyante ce svapne 'py anubhūta-smaraṇākārā vikalpās tasmān na viplavād vikalpasyâpi. tato nirvikalpa eva parisphutâkāraḥ pratyayaḥ* (Judgements that represent absent objects are experienced even in dreams, and these judgements do not have a vivid appearance. Now if we suppose that the vividness [of a cognition] is due to the power of confusion, nothing in dreams and so forth would lack vividness. Yet because judgements in the form of recollected experience [which is never as vivid as the direct experience itself] are also observed in dreams, the vividness of a judgement is not due to confusion. Therefore only non-judgemental cognition has a vivid image.).

sary at this point to draw a distinction between at least two types of judgement. As we saw in the previous chapter (cf page 55), with the termination of mental sensation there arises a particular type of judgement, which we called perceptual judgement, which corresponds to the activity of assigning a name or a property to the mental image of one specific continuum of aggregated atoms. An example of perceptual judgement would be: "This is a brown table." This is the most primitive kind of judgement there is, and we make use of it almost instinctively with respect to familiar objects such as tables, chairs, colours, etc.

A second type of judgement which was not discussed in chapter two and which will only briefly be discussed here, consists in making connections between manifestly different objects. Its formation requires the presence of at least two distinct constituents or the presence at different moments of no less than two instances of the "same" constituent. This is an important difference with the type of judgement mentioned above which requires the presence of only one constituent. This second category of judgement also operates at a different level of processing than the perceptual judgement, and in fact presupposes the existence of the latter in order to identify each of the constituents before establishing a relation. In other words, while direct sensory and mental sensation of an object is sufficient to give rise to a perceptual judgement and does not require the use of additional concepts, the second category of judgement does require the presence of concepts. Hence I will call this second type of judgement conceptual judgement because it is a judgement about concepts, as opposed to the perceptual judgement which refers to objects of sensation. Examples of conceptual judgements would be the principle of causality and the inference "this is the cause of that".

Notwitstanding their differences, one important characteristic that these two types

of judgement have in common is that they can be used even in the absence of the object(s) to which they are meant to refer, so that one can think about brown tables or causal relations without actually being a witness of these events. In this respect, concepts such as table or causality can serve in another conceptual process with which everyone is familiar: recollection. Unlike perceptual judgements, and similarly with conceptual judgements, the occurence of recollection precludes the presence of the sensory object. That is to say, the very presence of the object prevents the possibility of a judgemental activity such as recollection from occuring. For we mean by recollection the effort to recreate, by means of the concept with which it is associated, a mental image of an object that is at the moment unavailable to the senses. The mental image resulting from the act of recollecting is not, however, a real object; it is simply a mental construction, a judgement. Moreover, it is usually not as vivid as when the event to which it refers is present to the senses. Unless, argues Dharmakīrti, one undertakes the practice of meditation. And indeed, both the perceptual and the conceptual judgements can serve in the practice of meditation.

The nature of these meditation practices is revealed by Dharmakīrti's reference in verse 284 to meditation objects such as impure earth and so forth, which Manorathanandin explains as referring to the ability of the yogin to project an image of a bloated corpse—so that desire will not arise upon seeing a beautiful woman, for example[6]. This practice, which is thoroughly described by Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhimagga* (Vis IV) together with meditations on some forty other objects (Vis IIIff), strikes as a good example of what can be achieved through the intermediate of a perceptual

[6]PVV 121.13–4: *aśubhā vinīlaka-vipūryakâsthisaṁkalâdikā pṛthī-kṛtsnâdi abhūtam asatyam api bhāvanā-balena nirmitaṁ spaṣṭâbhaṁ nirvikalpakaṁ câsmābhir varṇyate* (A meditation object made of impure earth and so forth, such as a corpse, a rotting corpse and a skeleton, even though it is not present [or] real and it is constructed through the power of meditation, is described by us as having a vivid appearance and as being devoid of judgement).

judgement. Briefly, one begins such practice by staring at a corpse and constantly recalling that it is indeed a dead body, until the sign arises; that is, until one can visualize the corpse at will even with eyes closed so that the physical presence of the corpse is no longer necessary for the meditation practice to proceed. Note that the arising of the sign introduces an important difference in the procedure of this technique from what is done before the sign has arisen. The difference is that in the beginning of the practice one stares at an external visual object and repeatedly associates the concept "corpse" with it, while after one is capable of visualizing the corpse even with eyes closed, each further meditation session will not require the presence of the corpse for its success. Instead, upon repeating mentally the word or concept "corpse", a vivid image of a corpse will be produced. We find, therefore, that the recollection of a concept is essential at every stage of this practice, and especially at the higher level of visualization. But how can the concept give rise to a non-conceptual cognition?

With this question we are back to the objection raised against Dharmakīrti at the beginning of this section and, having covered all the verses which he dedicated to yogic intuition, we find that he was unable to provide a satisfactory answer to it. Indeed, he is content with saying in verses 284–5 (cf page 83) that meditation does lead to vivid cognitions of concepts and his argument stops there. But perhaps we should not be surprised by the brevity of his argument since this question is never really answered even in meditation manuals. Yet, this problem must be solved for Dharmakīrti's decision to include yogic intuition among the category of sensation to be justified, so that it cannot be dismissed so easily.

3.2.1 Meditation on perceptual objects

A possible solution to the question of how meditation on a concept can give rise to a non-conceptual cognition springs from the fact that the concepts used in meditations on such things as corpses and so forth are associated with a particular object of sensation at the beginning of the practice. That is to say, the experience at the core of the meditation is, at the beginning, not a concept but a vivid and non-conceptual cognition of a visual stimulus. More accurately, as we have seen in the previous chapter, in this visual cognition it is not the external aggregation of atoms that we directly know, but rather the image that it produces in the mind and which is known by mental sensation. The meditation practice, even in its beginning when its object is thought to be an external stimulus, therefore starts, like any other experience, with a vivid mental experience. And it is to such a series of mental sensations that the concept (or perceptual judgement) is applied. As the meditation proceeds, however, after the arising of the sign, we find that the perceptual judgement does not come to mind as a result of the occurence of a series of mental sensation, but rather that it arises before the mental sensation of the image of the corpse and serves as the object of recollection in an attempt to recreate the image which was cognized in the first phase of meditation by mental sensation. We find, therefore, that the whole process is circular in that it begins and ends with a non-conceptual, vivid mental image. For while in the first phase it is a vivid mental image created by an external stimulus that gives rise to the perceptual judgement, in the second phase it is the recollection of the judgement that recreates the mental image. And it is when these two images are identical one with the other, when the image produced by recollection is as vivid as the one produced by the external stimulus, that the meditation becomes perfected.

The only difference between these images is that the one resulting from the perfection of meditation is produced, during the visualization, independently of the activity of the senses, while the one produced in mental sensation and at the beginning of the meditation practice is dependent on the activity of the senses. The point then is that because the thing which one attempts to recreate mentally was at the outset a non-conceptual object, there are reasons to believe that it is possible to have vivid visualizations of corpses and similar objects through the perfection of meditation.

3.2.2 Meditation on conceptual objects

But while this argument could explain the vivid and non-conceptual visualization of perceptual objects (i.e. objects of perceptual judgement), it still remains to be shown whether it also solves the case of meditations on conceptual objects (i.e. objects of conceptual judgement); that is to say, meditations on such things as causality, impermanence, etc. This question is of great importance since, as Prajñākaragupta writes later on in his commentary, those meditations on perceptual objects such as corpses and so forth do not lead to liberation—though they can lead to various high levels of concentration and serve to temporarily eliminate craving (cf Vis III to XIII)[7]. It is only the meditation on the four noble truths that has this power to liberate the meditator. And since they are a conceptual object insofar as they establish universal relations between events such as craving and discontent, our examination of Dharmakīrti's account of yogic intuition will be incomplete until we have considered whether

[7]PVBh 327.14–5 and 19: *atattva-manaskāratvād aśubhâdīnān nâkāśe pṛthivy-ādīnāṁ sambhāvaḥ. atha pṛthivy-ādhayo 'pi vydyante yogi-pratyakṣeṇa dṛśyamānatvāt. [...] tatra yogināṁ yady apy amī pratibhāsante tathâpi karyârtham* asāv *atattva-rūpaiva bhāvanā* (Such things as impure earth and so forth do not appear in the air from the fact of concentrating on falsity. Yet, these things are experienced through introspection by yogic intuition. [... But] in this case, although they appear clearly to yogins, nevertheless from the point of view of achieving a goal this meditation is of the nature of falsity.).

meditation on conceptual objects can lead to vivid non-conceptual cognitions, as is possibly the case with perceptual judgements.

The first thing to note about the meditation on conceptual objects is that like the meditation on perceptual objects it can begin with the observation of physical sensations, such as the sensations on the body. Being aware of the body, the yogin trying to understand the four noble truths will try to notice the rise and fall of bodily sensations and will simultaneously call to mind the concept of impermanence in a form such as "materiality is impermanent". As concentration improves, he/she eventually becomes aware of the flow of sensations on the body, of the quick rise and fall of sensations, and therefore has an experience on the basis of which it is possible to conclude not only conceptually, but also experientially, that materiality is indeed impermanent, momentary. The validity of the judgement "materiality is impermanent" therefore becomes more and more evident as the meditation proceeds, and reaches the state of an unassailable truth once the yogin directly experiences the events at the source of the judgement.

In the same way that one develops an experiential understanding of impermanence, it is possible to develop an experiential understanding of painfulness and non-self, the other two principles at the core of the four noble truths. In the case of painfulness, one remains mindful of the rise and fall of bodily sensations and judges them as follows: "materiality is painful since it is subject to destruction." In the case of non-self, the judgement is: "materiality is not self since it has no core" (Vis XX:14–6). Upon observing both body and mind in terms of impermanence, painfulness and non-self, one eventually acquires experiential knowledge of the validity of these truths as applied to the entirety of the aggregates of personality, and it is this knowledge that will lead to dispassion and to the end of misery.

But although it has a strong basis in experience, it is difficult to see how this thorough understanding of the universal applicability of impermanence, painfulness and non-self could be acquired independently of conceptual activity. For what is known through these meditations are relations between events. For example, in the case of the knowledge of impermanence what is experienced directly, vividly and non-conceptually through the senses is first the presence of a bodily feeling and then, a moment later, the absence of a bodily feeling. The relation between these two events cannot be grasped by the senses, however, since one of the two events, namely the presence of a bodily feeling, now belongs to the past and the senses can only know what is immediately present. The relation between the two events can therefore only be known upon recollection of the event from the past, and since recollection is a conceptual activity the cognition is conceptual and cannot be a sensation. Another conceptual activity also occurs after the recollection of the past event: the establishment of its relation to the present event, which relation is essential to the conclusion that materiality is impermanent. In this light, it seems impossible to ever have a non-conceptual knowledge of the principle of impermanence.

And the situation is much the same with the knowledge of painfulness and non-self. For although it is possible that one has a very vivid experience of pain during the practice of meditation, the realization of painfulness that is supposed to bring about liberation is the realization that painfulness is a characteristic of every psycho-physical phenomena, not only of the ones experienced at the moment. And since judging on the basis of the observance of a few instances of painfulness that everything is marked by painfulness is an inference, the full realization of this first noble truth is a conceptual activity. As for the realization of non-self, this is also an inference based, this time, on the non-observation of an enduring self—as opposed to the observation of non-self—in

the totality of one's body and mind. And even if it is admitted that the yogin can survey his/her entire psycho-physical structure objectively and non-conceptually, the knowledge of non-self is not complete until the inference is drawn.

We must conclude, therefore, that the yogin's knowledge of all three aspects of the four noble truths, even when in deep meditation, cannot be acquired without at least some trace of conceptual thinking. This should not come as a surprise, however, since Vasuvandhu, who had a great influence on the thought of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, had already acknowledged that impermanence, painfulness and non-self were general properties (AKBh VI:14) which could only be discerned by the intellect. In fact, Dharmakīrti himself held the view that general properties could only be known by inference—hence conceptually, while only particular properties could be known by sensation. But if he really believed that general properties were mental constructs, why claim that the principles of the four noble truths are known non-conceptually by the yogin?

Before rejecting Dharmakīrti's account of yogic intuition as inconsistent and inconclusive, let us look at one last possible interpretation of his position.

3.2.3 Solution: self-awareness

As we have seen in chapter two Dharmakīrti defended a view according to which each moment of awareness has both an objective and a cognitive aspect. It is not impossible that the understanding of non-self, as was suggested at that time (cf page 50), lie in the direct perception of the simultaneous rise and fall of these two aspects of awareness and the realization that since they occur together there cannot be any enduring self separate from the objects of cognition. In other words, with the repeated meditation upon an object the distance between the cognizer and the object decreases until

there is the experience of there being no difference between the yogin and the object of meditation. And this experience of unity between the subject and the object of experience could be regarded as an instance of experiential knowledge of non-self. As it was mentioned above, however, in order to fully understand non-self, one must step out of that experience and use it as an inferential sign toward the conclusion that the whole continuum of body and mind lacks a self. Accordingly, although the experience may be devoid of concept, the understanding of the experience, which is what Dharmakīrti meant by yogic intuition, is not. Yet, this does not mean that there is no possibility for the intuition to count as a category of sensation since this piece of inferential knowledge can be known directly by self-awareness.

It is indeed a characteristic of Dharmakīrti's system that every act of awareness, whether conceptual or not, is self-evident insofar as it does not require the presence of another moment of awareness to make itself known (cf page 52). As a result, the cognition of a mental cognition is always direct and non-conceptual knowledge. Now if we look at the yogic intuition of impermanence, painfulness and non-self in this light, we find that while it must be admitted that the act of making the inference "there is no self" is indeed a conceptual act and that it plays a very significant role in the attainment of freedom, it must also be admitted that unless one knows that one has made this valid inference, it is very unlikely that the inference will have the psychological power necessary to stop the cycle of craving and misery which ruled the life of the yogin before the experience of non-self, painfulness and impermanence occurred. And since the knowledge of each mental event, according to the notion of self-awareness, is a non-conceptual knowledge, there is now a way to support the argument according to which the yogin's cognition of impermanence, painfulness and non-self is a piece of non-conceptual knowledge. Dharmakīrti's puzzling statement

that a yogin can have non-conceptual knowledge of a conceptual truth can therefore be understood to mean that yogic intuition is the awareness of the judgement "there is no self", once this judgement has been validated by the test of meditative experience. In other words, the yogin's intuition is really a type of mental sensation which is given another name only because it is the outcome of meditation and because its object is a set of concepts whose close correspondence to reality enables the meditator to achieve freedom from discontent.

3.3 Validation of yogic intuition

Now that we have investigated the nature of the yogic intuition, we must ask whether there are any criteria by means of which we could differentiate faulty intuitions from those that are veridical. For it is evident from looking at Dharmakīrti's treatment of this special kind of cognition that the vividness of the experience does not at all guarantee that it is in accordance with reality; hallucinations are examples of vivid experiences which are nonetheless completely false (PV II:282), and so are meditations on falsehood (PV II:285). We must therefore look elsewhere than at the vividness of a yogic intuition to determine its truthfulness.

Fortunately we do not have to look very far since Dharmakīrti was aware of the problem with the validation of yogic intuitions and identified at least two criteria in the last verse of his discussion of yogic intuition by means of which we could distinguish genuine intuitions from hallucinations. Let us first quote this important verse.

> tatra pramāṇam saṃvādi yat prāk nirṇīta-vastuvat
> tat bhāvanā-jaṃ pratyakṣam iṣṭam śeṣāḥ upaplavāḥ (PV II:286).
>
> In that context, the sensation arising from meditation that is reliable, like [meditation on] an object previously established, is accepted as a means of knowing. The rest are impediments.

As the verse clearly states, the first criterion is that the meditation be reliable; that is to say, the knowledge which is acquired at the end of the practice of meditation must enable one to achieve the expected result[8]. In that sense a given meditation practice may be reliable with respect to a given purpose and unreliable with respect to another. For example, the meditation on corpses and so forth, while it successfully prevents the arising of sexual desire upon seeing a beautiful woman, is nevertheless unreliable when it comes to achieving complete freedom from discontent, which is the ultimate goal of religious practice. In a religious context, Dharmakīrti argues that only meditation on the four noble truths is reliable since only the thorough experiential knowledge of the principles of the four noble truths which crowns the practice of meditation is powerful enough to put a definite end to the mental habits that imprison us in the cycle of discontent and rebirth. This is at least what Manorathanandin says should be understood by the passage "meditation on an object previously established" since he takes the word "*prag*" (previously) to refer to the first chapter of PV where Dharmakīrti is busy trying to give a logical basis for the four noble truths (PVV 121.20-1). For Dharmakīrti, the yogic intuitions that must be rejected as faulty are therefore those that conflict with the teachings of the Buddha. It appears, then, that his appeal to reliability is not really sincere and that in the final analysis Dharmakīrti is making a return to dogmatism since he will accept as true only the yogic intuitions that confirm what he already accepts intellectually to be the case.

But calling Dharmakīrti a dogmatist may be throwing false accusations at him. For as was just mentioned, a careful look at the content of PV I reveals that Dharma-

[8]Note that reliability was already mentioned as a criterion for truth in chapter one when we looked at Dharmakīrti's definition of truth (cf page 20). Also the sense in which the term *arthakriyā* is used here is not the same as the one employed to define the object of sensory cognition, whose reliability lies in the fact that it is capable of causing cognition (cf page 37). Rather, *arthakriyā* means, in the context of yogic intuition, the capacity to fulfill a purpose.

kīrti spares no energy trying to provide a logical basis for the four noble truths. Certainly, one may question the validity of his arguments, but at the same time it must be admitted that Dharmakīrti will not be happy with a religious doctrine that contradicts experience and is logically unaccountable. In this respect, it is possible that his confidence in the four noble truths is not a sign of dogmatism, but perhaps simply a sign that to his own satisfaction the teachings of the Buddha are coherent and true. And this brings us to the second criterion for denouncing faulty yogic intuitions and confirming those that are valid: logical consistency.

But that he appealed to logical consistency as a criterion for true yogic intuitions should not come as a surprise since he, his commentators and even the Buddha insisted that one should undertake the practice of meditation only after the validity of the object to be used in the meditation had been established by means of critical thinking (cf pages 15 and 76). And insofar as the object of intuition was already established logically before one undertook the practice of meditation, to find that meditation confirms one's beliefs should not be taken as a sign of dogmatism, but should instead be welcomed enthusiastically as an indicator that reason is not incompatible with the quest for spiritual freedom. For if we call dogmatism any situation in which an action or experiment gives the expected results, it would seem that any successful action, from the most simple one of reaching for a pen to the most complex of scientific experiments, should also be regarded as dogmatic. So instead of jumping to quick conclusions and calling Dharmakīrti a dogmatist, I suggest that we politely identify the flaws in his reasoning and be grateful that even though he flourished in a culture which put a remarkable amount of emphasis on various kinds of yogic feats, he remained unimpressed and appealed to logical consistency as a criterion for validating yogic intuitions.

3.4 Summary

We have seen in this chapter that despite Dharmakīrti's controversial account of yogic intuition, it is not impossible that the experience be a category of sensation, as he had set out to demonstrate in PV II. Yogic intuition, as a sensation, is then the direct awareness of the inference during *vipaśyanā* meditation that everything is marked by impermanence, painfulness and lack of self; an awareness which enables the yogin to replace the mental habits of craving and self-grasping by those of dispassion and equanimity which alone bring freedom and happiness. But if yogic intuition is merely the awareness of one's understanding of the principles at the core of the four noble truths, and if yogic intuition can be validated by appeal to the laws of logic, why not simply say that it is this conceptual understanding that is most important for liberation as opposed to saying that it is the non-conceptual knowledge of one's conceptual wisdom? In other words, why not make it clear that the yogin's intuition is a conceptual form of knowledge and define the experience as a valid inference which brings peace of mind, instead of trying to disguise it as a special form of sensation?

One way to explain Dharmakīrti's decision to favour the less intuitive of the two alternatives and describe yogic intuition as a category of sensation is, I believe, to acknowledge that Dharmakīrti was aware of the problem of induction. That is to say, Dharmakīrti was aware that while direct factual knowledge is generally reliable, inductive knowledge is never completely safe since it is always subject to refutation by the discovery of hitherto unknown evidence. Consequently, in order to make the teachings of the Buddha unassailable, he had no choice but to find a way to include his intuition of the four noble truths among the various types of sensations. And it would be because conceptual knowledge does not have the psychological force which direct,

vivid, non-conceptual experience has, and cannot therefore produce the mental transformation necessary for the attainment of freedom, that Dharmakīrti emphasized the self-awareness aspect of the cognitive act, as opposed to its inferential and conceptual aspects.

But while this explanation appeals to common sense insofar as it is generally agreed that no descriptive knowledge of an event reveals as much as direct acquaintance with it, the fact remains that the object of liberative knowledge is a concept, not a particular. In terms of religious aspirations, ultimate reality therefore has the nature of a universal concept. And this contradicts everything that Dharmakīrti had set out to demonstrate in his theory of language, according to which words and concepts are never accurate representations of reality and conceptual knowledge is never as reliable as what is known directly in sensation. So no matter how much the knowledge of impermanence, painfulness and non-self is conducive to the pacification of defilements, Dharmakīrti's account of yogic intuition will always remain controversial because it undermines his effort to refute the existence of universal properties.

Conclusion

It was pointed out in chapter one that contrary to the modern tendency to place high emphasis on personal experience and dispense with logical consistency, Buddhists of classical India believed that it was important to establish religious doctrines and experiences on solid logical grounds before accepting them as true. Dharmakīrti was among those who adhered to this belief, and he wrote no less than seven treatises investigating the nature of knowledge, hoping to discover methods which would enable people to arrive at knowledge and achieve human perfection without having to rely uncritically on scriptures and the testimonies of yogins.

In his effort, after stating that in order to be regarded as knowledge a cognition must successfully lead to the realization of goals or reveal hitherto unknown things, Dharmakīrti said that there were only two ways to secure knowledge: either through direct acquaintance with the object during sensation, or indirectly through inference. As we have seen in the second chapter, ordinary sensation is the most reliable means of knowing because it deals with facts and is devoid of concept. It proceeds in two main stages before the appearance of concepts. First there is the cognition of momentary aggregations of atoms through any one of the five physical senses which, when successful, produces a mental image of the stimulus and arouses one's attention. Once attention is given to the sensory cognition, we are involved in the second type of sensation discussed by Dharmakīrti, mental sensation, which is another direct and

non-conceptual mode of cognition. This category of sensation is very important in his system for it is only at this stage in the cognitive process that we can begin to speak of knowledge, since it is only upon directing one's attention to the content of one's mind that knowledge can occur. Accordingly, it has been argued that Dharmakīrti's approach to knowledge could be described as phenomenalism—as opposed to realism or idealism. The most interesting aspect of mental sensation, however, is perhaps the fact that every mental phenomenon, whether the result of sensory cognition or of thinking, is said to be self-luminous insofar as there is direct awareness of the content of one's mind simultaneously with the awareness of that awareness; i.e. the awareness of blue and the awareness of seeing both result from a single mental image of blue.

While sensory cognition and mental sensation describe the normal process of sensation, the third type of sensation discussed by Dharmakīrti is more extraordinary; it is called yogic intuition. As we have seen in the last chapter, this special cognition crowns the practice of meditation on the four noble truths and consequently, unlike sensory cognition and mental sensation, pertains to conceptual objects, not to facts. There lies in fact the most serious problem with Dharmakīrti's account of the yogic experience, for although it involves concepts and resembles an inference more than a sensation, Dharmakīrti insisted that it be accepted as a category of sensation. His reason for holding such a counterintuitive position is psychological in character, rather than epistemological. He argues that the vividness of the knowledge of impermanence, painfulness and non-self acquired on the culmination of meditation practice is psychologically as powerful as direct acquaintance with facts. Moreover, although the yogin's knowledge is conceptual and concepts are always false insofar as they are incomplete approximations of reality, the knowledge of the four noble truths is different from any other form of conceptual knowledge insofar as it alone successfully leads

to the achievement of complete freedom, of *nirvāṇa*. We have demonstrated, however, that appeal to vividness is not a sufficient reason to regard the yogin's knowledge as a form of sensation because the concepts that are known by the yogin establish relations between events and the establishment of relations is always a conceptual act, of which sensation is free by definition. We have seen, however, that by appealing to the notion of self-awareness, which is a property of every mental event, it was possible to justify Dharmakīrti's decision to consider yogic intuition as a sensation. Indeed, approached as a form of mental sensation, the yogin's knowledge of the four noble truths could qualify as a category of non-conceptual knowledge if we emphasized not its objective aspect, which is conceptual, but rather its self-luminous aspect. In this context, the yogin's intuition would be the non-conceptual and direct awareness of having established experientially the truth of the inferences that everything is marked by impermanence, painfulness and non-self.

Having recourse to self-awareness to disguise the yogin's intuition as a form of sensation is not satisfactory, however, especially since it does nothing to explain the unexpected result that ultimate reality is now a conceptual object and not a particular. The only consolation we can have from analysing Dharmakīrti's controversial account of yogic intuition is thus that in order to be true, Dharmakīrti says that a yogic experience must not only lead to the expected result, but must also be logically coherent. And in this respect, his system is a confirmation of the argument of the first chapter that epistemology and its testing apparatus must be an integral part of the religious quest.

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